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PUPPET PLAYS

BY
ALFRED KREYMBORG

With a Preface by
GORDON CRAIG



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These plays are dedicated to

Edward J. O'Brien,

Conrad Aiken,

E. Powys Mathers,

Jack Andersen,

Phillips Russell,

John Gould Fletcher,

Bee Knudsen.

TO THE PLAYERS

Six of these plays were originally published under the title, "Plays for Poem-Mimes" (New York, 1918). The present edition contains a number of revisions; and a new play, "Pianissimo."

Obviously, the characters throughout are in love; they are therefore subject to primitive designs of puppetry, controlled by a circumstantial figure or puppeteer, however vague or varied his outline, or curious the manifestation of his will. Nevertheless, the plays are intended for human as well as for wooden actors; they have, in fact, been performed by both groups; but so far—with all deference to stage folk as he has known them—the author of these experiments owes a deeper debt to the lifeless nonentities who have honoured him with their friendship and served him with their patience. The plays make certain technical demands upon an ensemble; there is, for example, a type of contrapuntal ritual to be sounded; of harmonious pantomime to be observed. Burattini, marionettes, puppazzi—call them what you will—have invariably apprehended these demands with a fidelity the author has never quite seen or heard duplicated by a company of human actors. These suggestions are not ventured as a challenge to the latter, but rather as a request for them to consider—if and when they put these things on—to do so with the art of the puppet theatre as a constant, though miniature, model.

A. K.

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INTRODUCTION

Plays are to be acted.

A hundred people have said this before—and some said it before acting or plays were known to us . . . in Italy, maybe, or in India, or in China . . . those lands which knew the Drama earlier than we did.

The truth is that this truth is as old as the hills of Yun-ling.

If I repeat it, it is only because no one has stopped to really listen when Mr. Pinero repeated it.

He repeated it because no one heard M. Scribe. Scribe said it again because no one listened to Molière, and Molière said it (and printed it in his plays too) because . . . one can go on, on and on till one reaches the hills of Yung-ling.

This being true, until Mr. Kreymborg's plays are acting before us we shall not know if they are plays: until we ask the actors and stage-managers of them to prove it, we shall hardly know if they are GOOD plays.

A good stage play acts easily—that is the test.

"Macbeth" is not so good a play as "Candida." What Bernard Shaw possibly meant when he said that Shakespeare was not a patch on Shaw as a playwright is this: Shaw can be acted by anybody and succeed: Shakespeare takes some playing. He is difficile.

And here is Kreymborg with a new sort of play.

I am one of Kreymborg's many friends, and he does me the honour of asking me to say a word about these plays.

But that I cannot do as properly as I should like to do until I have seen them acted, or until I have listened to a scene or two being run through by actors, or with marionettes.

I can only say a word of Kreymborg himself, and unstage-like plays in general.

Kreymborg is from America; he went there going round by a Scandinavian route, and he got away from New York one day and came to Rapallo to see me.

Before coming he had seen most things and so was already a kind creature—without curiosity—a delightful talker—made me laugh—and was not curious about the way I dine from marble tables, and wear leather and wool.

Kreymborg told me as we sat in Sant' Ambrogio—that he had lived the first twenty years of his life in a house in the shadow of a railway which all day and night held trains which rattled past the first-floor windows: that he had not left this house to see the grass and sky in the country for twenty years. Even William Blake could walk on Primrose Hill. . . .

So it is wonderful to think that this sweet-natured man from America has not become like a piece of cold stone.

I sometimes find it rather difficult to READ Kreymborg's plays. I incline to the belief that they would go very well on a stage, and that, if they read more easily, it's likely they would not act well.

All this is supposition, for, as I have said, and as all the world has known for years, there is no other test but the acting of a play.

Managers, believing that they have the prescience of Jupiter (and even Jove found he could make mistakes),

put on a play with immense assurance, and are staggered to find that it has to come off after six days.

It's not of any use for us to attempt to find excuses for the failure of a true play,—to say that the critics damned it to death,—and that a cabal was formed to hiss and ruin its chances. These and other reasons are *fol-de-rol*.

A good play will succeed—if written for the stage by a stage man and acted by stage folk with *gusto*—(*gusto* is an Italian word and means taste) *gusto* in English signifies zest: zest should, but doesn't always, imply taste as well as zeal.

If our stage in England were all it should be, why then of course we should have playhouses where none but good plays would be written and acted. But what writer of plays cares to give up his whole life to ONE theatre—ONE stage manager—ONE troupe of comedians—and ONE anything?

One is a number he does not like. "One God, one Farinelli"—"One God, one Voltaire." All that has for a while passed away. The more the pity . . . nonsensical as it may have been in its exaggeration.

The modern writer of plays likes the figure 10 better: 10 per cent. is more usual. And the truth of it is that play-writers love 10 per cent. of the receipts from twenty theatres far better than 10 per cent. from one theatre.

Plays being solely for acting purposes, it stands to reason that they must be conceived, made and shown in a theatre . . . for that is our workshop.

Molière made his plays in a theatre, and often before they were quite finished they were put into re-

hearsal. The play was clear to the author, but the dialogue was not all down in black and white; some scene in the first act, or one in the fourth, was still to be completed: but hot from his brain, they passed to the stage and into rehearsal. He rehearses them—he adds—he cuts out—he replaces—he bends it here and there—completes it as he goes—ON THE STAGE. It is ready—and still hot. The audience comes to it—a live thing moving before them. They become of a piece with it . . . Drama! or rather one kind of Drama.

For there is another kind which is cold and hard as marble—marble free of colour, and shining or sparkling—cold and hard as the words of Job. Of that I have written elsewhere.

Here all I can speak of is the Drama of our times, of which the supreme existing examples are by Molière.

Not by Shakespeare—by Molière.

Shakespeare is dangerously near being no dramatist at all; only by a miracle (for the process we have not yet defined) does he leap into the blaze of destruction and save the situation.

Molière, then, is the best man of the lot.

With an ease unknown to the English, except once when Sheridan strolled across the stage, he passes before us every night we care to see him from 8 o'clock to 10.30, doing wonders.

In two and a half hours he creates a little world which is the same old world and yet as fresh as daisies. Irresistible, . . . a master.

And what of the others?—let us come to to-day, and come to Hecuba and why I like these plays by Kreyborg.

To-day we have some easy professional play-writers. Showing nothing like the grand ease of Molière (and this they all admit, venerating him as much as I do), they still show immense skill; some show beauty.

I am not here to praise Mr. Pinero, Mr. Henry Arthur Jones, Sir James Barrie, Mr. Shaw, and a round dozen other really professional play-writers.

We all know their delightful work, which has given so many of us happy hours and ever-to-be-treasured remembrances. Some of us will never forget Paula Tanqueray of 1893, Peter Pan, Rose Trelawny, Dick Phenyl and Lord Quex.

Enough. I am not here to praise the excellent. I wish to solve a little problem. And the problem is this:

What should be done with Mr. Kreymborg's plays—Mr. Conrad's plays—and the plays and dramatic poems of John Masefield and W. B. Yeats, of Byron and Goethe and Shelley,—Blake's fragments of plays, and the plays of a few more of those writers who are not professional play-writers, and not of the stage?

"Sack the lot," says the "Daily Mail."

I have moments when I, too, admire that spirit. And I should join in the howl "sack them! sack them!" if I had not the honour of belonging to the English stage.

"All the more reason for being rid of these unprofessional unstage-like makers of written plays."

You think so? I do not, since I belong to the English stage.

I prefer Monsieur Molière to Mr. Conrad. Monsieur Molière is . . . how can I put it? . . . one of us. Mr. Conrad is frankly an outsider. Can I put it that way and not offend?

The question is not whether Molière or a new

Molière would pay better than Mr. Conrad. I should like him better to work with because he has taken the trouble to learn his business—our business. He really is one of us. Whereas Mr. Conrad is a writer who is rather indifferent about the stage and its people. "They say so":—but his work for the stage proves this better than all saying.

In spite of all this I am all for Mr. Conrad, Mr. Kreymborg and every other writer of plays of the unprofessional kind.

For this reason:

Our unorganised stage lacks discipline, and it lacks it BECAUSE IT WILL NOT EXERCISE. We must exercise ourselves on doing the more difficult rather than the more or less easy job.

Put me in power—on this paper—it will cost you nothing. Allow me a theatre for the moment—here for a halfpenny.

I call my company together.

Not the actors only—the entire staff and a few of the best actors. We are now on our stage.

"We have two plays here. We will produce them. They are very difficult."

May I here suggest that all of my men and women helpers are alert, and, on hearing this, are keener than if I were to say, "We have here two plays like 'Uncle Tom's Cabin.'" May I suggest that my assistants prefer a new difficult task to one they have done over and over again.

"The author of the first play is a poet; the author of the second is a novelist. Let us consider job number one first."

"This play is modern and written in prose:—you know what prose is, Isherwood?"

"Yes, sir,—print."

"Exactly."

(Isherwood attends to the lighting arrangements, and is invaluable.)

"Well, in Act One we have the appearance of three ghosts."

(Isherwood understands better than all the rest what prose means now.)

"These ghosts speak exactly like the living people. They come on and go off among them—and are seen by two or three of the living people, but not by all."

(By the time I reach this statement the oldest stager, my best of comedians, is feeling slightly exasperated. The rest catch his state of soul . . . bless him!)

"Now, how to make this clear to the audience is not yet clear to me." (Laughter.) "But as our business, yours as well as mine, is to MAKE it clear, I think we had better be as serious as possible about it."

(By this time Miss Minnie Mars has glanced pityingly at James Placket, and the couple, in this look, have decided to leave my theatre and join Mr. Bourchier's . . . if they can get in.)

"Now is the time for a little extra attention to clause 30 of the contracts."

(Minnie and James forget their momentary, but very fell, purpose, and recall that clause 30 in their contract is something about an increase in salary—or a division of spoils—on the successful achievement of any very difficult piece of work.

I dislike interrupting my beautiful speech to the staff by these repeated explanations, but there is no help for it.

And here I have to go on interrupting.

It's not to be supposed that money and only money can cause a theatrical revolt to calm down. Theatre people are less mercenary than any other professional people that I know; but they do appreciate a little extra:—who does not?—only the idiots. Theatre people prefer a little extra on to a good salary, to any amount of the minimum wage business.

I believe in maximum wage and a little extra on occasions.

That is why you put me in power, allowed me a theatre, and gave me enough to run it PROPERLY. You were wise.

You knew that to give me barely enough was to waste money; you knew that to supply enough and a bit over was to gain money.

For, have I not produced for you "The Merchant of Venice" which ran for over 400 nights?—and the "Ballet of London" which ran two years?—and "The Strange History of Martin Fell," which is still running?—and have you not all had a good return for your money?

Exactly. You gambled or invested (use whichever word you prefer) like Molière wrote his plays. . . . easily, largely, without pinched-up noses.

You trusted in my talents as a theatre man and made no suggestions. You left all to me and my right-hand man, the business manager.

Very well then. Since I have succeeded with those first three productions, I now intend to put on two other rather unusual plays: these two difficult plays which will not run two years or 400 nights. They will be part of my repertoire.

You made it possible for me to run what is called "repertoire," but which in Europe has no name, being an everyday affair—ordinary and quite easy.

You saw that it was easy too. We took three theatres and ran repertoire in one. In the middle-sized one.

And now to proceed with my speech to my fellow workers):

"We will rehearse this play in a new way, I have an idea."

(I tell them the idea, and the method I intend to employ. I do not write it down here—because it's one of the eighteen ideas I have a wish to keep till I use it myself. I've given out ideas which the good Reinhardt, Cochran, Barker and others have used; and the world has said that they made practical what I could not make practical.

What is meant was this:

THEY USED THE IDEAS BECAUSE THEY SAW THEY WERE PRACTICAL—and, of course, to see that a practical idea is usable is quite good sense.

We start work on the play with the ghosts.

We tussle with it—despair about it—go on, and at last make it really what it was—a wonderful

thing in its way . . . a way we were not used to, . . . nor you. For it wasn't in our way. But we went towards it and the result is success. WE EXERTED OURSELVES—WE GOT WARM—WE OVERCAME DIFFICULTY AFTER DIFFICULTY—WE FORCED THE WHOLE SOUL OF OUR THEATRE SO TO THE CONCEIT OF THE POET THAT WE HAVE COME OFF VICTORIOUS WITH HIM.)

Having done this we returned to the other difficult play.

Suppose it had been by Mr. Conrad;—suppose it “The Secret Agent.” Suppose Mr. Conrad was even too indifferent at that time to re-write his novel “The Secret Agent” as a play, and suppose he gave us the novel as it stood and said, “Do as you like with it.”

I won't suppose Mr. Conrad dead—but there was once a novel by Dostoievsky, who is dead, called, “The Brothers Karamazoff.”

A theatre in Moscow took this novel—acted the dialogue as it stood—and, where there was a long description of what was happening which couldn't be brought on the scene, this part was read from the book by one of the best readers in the theatre, who stood at the side of the stage.

“How dull!” you say—or you think so. The audience did not. It was played some 250 times I am told, and paid well.

And the audience of my theatre will not think it dull since Moscow didn't,—for we have by now (thanks to our backers) created a big audience of our own who come to see all that we have prepared for them—some 200,000 people. They have at last come to trust us—

and they see now that all we want is to do good things and please them.

When we put on a more spectacular piece, we get some 400,000 to come.

Yes, we do not despise spectacle—we like it—and we do it pretty well. Our yearly pantomime at Christmas is always looked for with excitement. Nor do we, as you see, despise Mr. Conrad's plays or Mr. Kreymborg's.

Conrad's may be a piece for actors—Kreymborg's a piece for marionettes. Æschylus wrote a piece for actors and also did not hesitate to use images in the form of man.

It is up to us to be able to perform any play and make it live and delight you, provided you are not going to hamper us by having a fixed idea in your heads as to what we may do and what we may not do, for that is for us to decide.

That's what I wanted to say. And until our Theatre will let me or someone reorganise the English by one such theatre's taking the lead—and until it ENCOURAGES BY EVERY PRACTICAL AND SPIRITED MEANS, ITS OLD POWERS TO REASSERT THEMSELVES,—brings England to see that a lot of money invested in such a theatre is not a loss, but that a little skinflintish sum is less than nothing and is lost at once and for ever—until this—(and I hope the day is near) you will not have a fine and sensible theatre again nor be able to take tickets for every kind of drama done in every kind of way—good drama well done.

One more word for our country—England.

Remember, you cheat yourselves out of the good

plays, actors and productions because you don't support theatre men of the old English spirit. That spirit doesn't brook being dictated to. You know this, yet you allow Public Opinion—i.e., the opinion of cliques—to deride all originality and all independence, and this prevents original artists from working for you. I don't deny that many of our English men of the theatre have great talents—all I assert is that you forbid them to exert their talents.

Who has produced Shakespeare lately?—No one. At least we will not call that "producing Shakespeare."

Who has produced Sheridan? . . . "The School for Scandal," "The Rivals," "The Duenna"? Who has produced Byron's plays—Browning's—Goldsmith's? and the vast foreign drama? Who has handled these pieces properly—interpreting them afresh?

No one. And yet these plays could be so produced that the present generation would say, "Why, these are new plays, and delicious."

New plays, and old plays made new by our treatment of them, is what I make a plea for. Shakespeare, Sheridan, Conrad, and Kreymborg.—Shaw, Barrie, Byron, Blake, Tolstoi, Strindberg, Molière, Gozzi, Goldoni, Shelley, Gorki, Racine, Scala, Gogol,—why not?

ALL the plays; and the operas too; and the ballets and the pantomimes and the puppet plays. The operas and ballets of Rameau, Gluck, Offenbach, Mozart, Beethoven: Weber's operas and those by Cimarosa; Bizet by all means but Purcell too; Handel and Hasse and Lecoq; for all, in their own way, are good; and if not AS YET interesting to see played in a theatre, it is because we of the theatre are not yet disciplined by suf-

ficient exercise, and because you, the spectators, do not help us by allowing us to do more, as we want to do.

In short, give the stage more freedom and you will have a stage which is worth having.

GORDON CRAIG

WHEN THE WILLOW NODS

PUPPET PLAYS

WHEN THE WILLOW NODS *

(A Dance Play)

A dense wood of indiscriminate trees builds a careless wall around a willow leaning over a suggestion of pond. Sun splotches belie the illusion that the time of day is dusk. AN OLD FIGURE, seated on a low stone ledge. His attire might rouse the inference that he believes simplicity to be the denouement of all complexities. He speaks with a detached air in a rubato tempo, like one who improvises; and occasionally caresses a small hidden instrument or drum with exquisite, haphazard rhythms. Varying intervals of silence break his speech. A GIRL and A BOY; and later, A SECOND BOY. With them simplicity is doubtless the beginning of all things. THE GIRL and BOYS do not speak, but act the improvisation of THE FIGURE in a dance or pantomime which discloses a series of unconscious poses, naive, awkward, uncertain, shy. They appear to be the physical embodiment of the thought-play of THE FIGURE. He is unseen by them, but it is evident that they can hear him, most of the time, separately. It is questionable whether THE FIGURE can see them. At the rise of the curtain THE FIGURE is alone, and begins:

* Copyright, 1918, by Alfred Kreymborg.

Only when the willow nods
 does the water nod;
 only when the wind nods
 does the willow nod;
 only when a cloud nods
 does the wind nod;
 and, of course, nod
 rhymes with God. . . .

[THE GIRL *wanders in; looks up at the willow; approaches the water; kneels.*

Better
 that you look
 lovely
 than that you are
 lovely—
 yes,
 oh yes,
 touch your blouse, touch your hair,
 when he comes,
 touch your cheeks
 with the pink that flies;
 but his glance
 will do more
 for your look
 than these. . . .

[*Indefinite poses of self-contemplation.* THE FIRST BOY
wanders in, left, carrying a small basket.

Your least sly look
 recreates folk
 to your image.

Not that they know what your image is,
nor that they care—but—
won't you look at him?
He'd like to look like you—
then you'll love him? . . .

[*Rapture holds THE BOY; he sets the basket on the ground. THE GIRL stiffens into another pose.*

She has made cups
of her hands.
She holds them,
palms waiting,
under her breasts.
If you look still higher
you may see
three more cups—
her mouth,
her eyes.
And there is a cup
you cannot see.
Brave lad,
can you resist so many? . . .

[*THE BOY'S ecstasy crumbles to excitement, as THE GIRL looks at him vaguely.*

What can you—
what should you—
what shall you say—
so—
so only—
so only she'll—

what can you—
what should you—
what shall you swear?
Could I
let you give her
the earth,
or a tree—
lend you
something
more than you,
more than me—
how can you—
how should you—
how else could you
make her—
urge her to—
have her say,
whisper,
breathe—
breathe she—
breathe that she—
what can you—
what should you—
what shall you do?
You might
jump—
jump off—
and never come back!
And she—
she only—
she only say—
no! . . .

[THE GIRL looks at THE BOY clearly. She moves from the water. He follows. She stops beyond the willow. He hesitates.

Do you feel him
a thing of silk—
now you can hear him?
Must you be always
tearing his flesh—
with your eyes, and your silence?
Put a quick finger
on one of his pores—
touch it at least—
or he will fall,
bloodless,
at your feet—
and leave you nobody.
You wouldn't enjoy
turning ghoul?
Faun girl,
you are beautiful—
be kind
to yourself. . . .

[THE GIRL starts towards THE BOY; permits him gradually and gently to caress her.

Place your cool mouth
to his.
Press hard and long.
There will come opening
and things
which have never sung before.

Things even you
will never understand. Nor he,
Turn your large eyes
to his.
Enter.
You will see
what you heard—
and the mystery grow.
At the last,
bring your curious touch
to his.
Hands
move to the breeze. . . .

[*Frightened*, THE GIRL *draws away; she suddenly disappears*. *Awed*, THE BOY *cannot follow her*.

She loves you?
And who are you—
who are you that she should?
Don't ask me that—
ask tiny questions.
She of the yellow hair,
she of the cool green eyes,
she of the queer red mouth?—
I know whom you mean.
Come, lad.
Tell me more about her.
Don't be afraid.
She loves you?
So you said. . . .
Away,
away from this place—

there's a pond past these trees—
let's steal to a boat,
a long eerie boat,
and drift to the water lilies—
pink, blue or white,
lilies are quiet thoughts.
We won't break them for her.
We don't have to. . . .
Eh?
She loves you?
Poor boy,
are you so happy you're sad?

[THE BOY *is gone*.

Dream, boy,
lilies will wake you,
pink, blue or white.
No matter the color,
no harm can come.
She loves you. . . .

[*Interlude.* THE FIGURE, *reflectively*:

Trees, too,
are innocent entities.
Sap sings through them
in time with the weather.
One can see
they care little about their fellows,
though they do have a way
of waving branches to each other.

For themselves,
they have a way
of nodding pleasantly.
Also of trying on dresses
near a rain glass or a snow glass.
Also of staying where they happen to be. . . .
There are folk who doubt
whether they care at all.
It would be mean though
to censure
trees—they're trees. * * *

[The lovers come running upon the scene, he chasing her. He kicks the basket aside; buttercups fall out.]

What animals you are
or whether you are
animals, I
am too dumb to tell.
Some moments,
I feel you've come out of the earth,
out of some cool white stone
deep down in the earth;
or there brushes past
and lurks in a corner
the thought
that you slipped from a tree
when the earth stopped spinning,
that a blue shell brought you
when the sea tired waltzing.
You might be two mice,
the dryads of woodpeckers,
or a pure tiny fish dream;

you might be something dropped from the sky;
not god-children—
I wouldn't have you that—
nor clouds—
though I love clouds.
You're something not birds,
I can tell.
If I could find you somewhere
outside
of me, I might tell—
but inside? . . .

[THE BOY catches THE GIRL; she no longer resists; he
kisses her.

She is lovely.
Her mouth is red.
Give her a kiss.
She wants it. . . .
And when you are through?
Give her another!
But you don't understand?
Why should you?

[*Exhausted*, THE GIRL draws away. THE BOY reluctantly builds her a throne of fallen leaves. She sits down; he hands her the buttercups, a few at a time, and some colored scarfs.

Do not make her
so happy
that when the time comes
to make her unhappy

she will be
so unhappy
she will die, lad.
Can't you be cross with her?
Can't you fail to
bring her those buttercups?
Can't you
twang somewhere else
now and then?
She'll love you the more?
Then hers is the crime if she dies!
It isn't?
Whose is it?
Better make her unhappy at once!
You can't? Well—
I don't know what you should do! . . .

[THE GIRL, possibly sated with attention, stretches out on the leaves. THE BOY watches her; comes closer; seems doubtful; stops. Then he sits down near her. Something holds him still; something else draws him still closer.]

She wears no scarf
over her hair,
no mask
over her eyes,
over her mouth.
Nor do you ask her to:
thus, you love her.
Nor do you see
veils
round her breasts,

veils
down her limbs.
Ask you to?
I speak to a stone.
You love her, thus. . . .

[THE GIRL *is startled*. THE BOY *touches her*. She looks at him, rouses herself, gets up. He turns aside. She moves away. He does not follow her.

If he were sober
he would love you
as you wish to be loved
and as he would love you
if his muddled thought of you
were clear of desire.
It is sad that one so young
should be drunken so soon,
but had you not answered him,
had you not answered him. . . .
I know,
I know
it wasn't your fault. . . .

[*Slowly, the lovers depart in opposite directions.*

May the sun
blink open your eyes
and find the room within
all blue,
and that tiny
broken relic
of the night's unhappiness
vanish like a moth.

You will see,
no bird
can fly
more swiftly away. . . .

[*Interlude.* THE FIGURE, *reflectively*:

. . . again
under the spell
of these warm-scented troubadour winds
brushing winter's convent
with insinuating madrigals,
those novices,
the trees,
clicking their crooked black needles,
are knitting lace—
is it yellow, is it green?—
timid in pattern,
as clouds are,
what with their dropping of stitches.
. . . later,
grown almost heretic
through warmth of their own,
or under the foolish persuasion
that beauty can add to beauty—
and hold beauty—
one or two
will work in
patches of flowers.
. . . once again, the troubadours—
some sated, some broken-hearted—
will slip away,
and the convent be as before.

. . . maybe
the Mother Superior
frowns them off? . . .

[THE BOY *enters dejectedly. His movements are indeterminate; but he stops near the willow.*

You are so straight and still.
What does it mean?
Are you concerned
in the tops of you now
with sky matters
and winter butterflies?
Do not the leaves you colored
trouble you longer?
Try and recall!
Try and recall:
Over this path
she used to tread her way,
over there
he used to throne them for her:
green, brown, red, yellow!
Did you look at me?
Did you say something? . . .

[THE BOY *departs. . . . THE GIRL enters dejectedly. She sits down near the scattered remains of the throne.*

Girl:
Is the sap in you tired
that you no longer resist the wind?
Did you feel the rain,
the rain that was here in the night?

You aren't old—
what then?
Another rain may be lighter?
Even if it isn't—
no? . . .

[*After a silence, THE FIGURE:*

She loved her love for him.
But ask her how it died,
she will cry,
his faults came and stabbed it.
Over the tomb she had scrolled,
"My love for him is dead,
but my love lives on."
And her love
carries white flowers
to what was her love for him. . .

[*THE SECOND BOY enters. He looks at THE GIRL. But as THE FIGURE continues, THE BOY passes aimlessly through.*

Beware, lad.
There's a lane of cherry trees
on the turn from his grave.
Don't look at her,
or you'll be plucking blossoms
in blossom time,
blossoms being pink,
or cherries in cherry time,
cherries being red;
and seeing they're a pretty

variation from the white,
her love will carry them
to what was her love for him. . . .

[THE GIRL *has not seen* THE SECOND BOY. *She leaves*
the wood. After a silence, THE FIGURE:

Only when the willow nods
does the water nod;
only when the wind nods
does the willow nod;
only when a cloud nods
does the wind nod;
and, of course, nod
rhymes with God. . . .

[*Slow curtain.*

BLUE AND GREEN

BLUE AND GREEN *

(A Shadow-Play)

Three different miniature scenes which, for convenience, might be understood as, Scene I, Scene II, Scene III. In Scene I, the predominant note is a group of live oaks; Scene II, cedars, one of which is taller than the rest, in an environment of yellow desert and sage-brush; Scene III, a single, tall eucalyptus in red-blossom time. A hint of blue sea forms the background. The action takes place with the three scenes constantly in view.

A YOUNG MAN *is hurriedly looking about among the live oaks. Their low, gnarled stature and twisted arms throw weird shadows about him. HE stops and speaks breathlessly—*

She blew two kisses—
down an air current—
and I at the other end—
it felt like the
roar, darkness and mad rocks
of an iniquitous cave!
But this is no cave?
Two kisses?
Why, there were eight of them,
each the more insidious
for the silence of them,

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eight thistle-down ubiquities
avalanched by the eight fingers of her two hands—
there would have been ten had she thought of her
thumbs!

Woman never expresses herself
unless man has brought the occasion,
and then only, only when
a period has elapsed
sufficient to provide her
with some indubitable credential
of the character of his intention?

Immortal controversy!—
why, the character of mine
has been chasing her for days,
clutching at her like a tree,
shouting imprecation!

But at that egregious moment—
I said nothing, asked nothing, did nothing, when—
quicker than a breeze or a rain-drop—
two kisses, eight kisses, ten?
Can it be she loves me at last? . . .

[A YOUNG WOMAN *has appeared under one of the oaks.*
SHE *eyes him*; HE *eyes her*. They parley.

HE: You blew two kisses—

SHE: I did not—

HE: Eight kisses—

SHE: I did not—

HE: There would have been ten—

SHE: There would not—

HE: You love me—

SHE: I do not!

HE: At any rate—

SHE: At any rate?

HE: Come and sit down.

SHE: I've sat down before.

HE: Let us weigh the question.

SHE: We've weighed it before.

HE: Or premise a new discussion—

SHE: Old discussion—

HE: With the assumption you don't love me—

SHE: The assumption?

HE: The admission! . . .

[SHE approaches warily. HE arranges a place on the ground for her. HE sits down a fair distance away.]

HE: Higggle—

SHE: Hagggle—

HE: Hagggle—

SHE: Higggle—

HE: I know

my craziness about you
is compounded of some
fifty percent
craziness about me,
but if you
will chip from your
hundred percent (if it's that)
craziness about you
five or ten percent for a
craziness about me,
I feel mayhap
we'd compound a single craziness

so marvelously sane
the very fishwives would covet it!
Let the males of the market
flout it, barter
of a bag of stale flounders
for a luscious fresh vegetable,
or shriek: he's passed a counterfeit!
I'll even take in exchange
a Chinese coin
ninety-nine percent hole
and leave it at our demise
to dance along the silver-wire
memory of immortal bits!

SHE: And your counterfeit?

HE: My your-me?

I'm sorry
I can't
weigh that—
will you?

SHE: (*mischievously*):

Higgle—

HE: (*in disgust*):

Haggle—

SHE: Haggle—

HE: Damn! . . .

[HE has moved closer to her; but turns away. SHE touches him. They embrace tenderly. Pause. They release each other. HE looks down.]

SHE: You love me?

HE: Verily.

And you me?

SHE: Indeed!

HE: How you starved me—

SHE: I did not—

I blew you two kisses?

HE: Eight kisses!

SHE: Ten thousand!

HE: With your thumbs?

SHE: With my thought!

HE: Blessed fishwife!

SHE: Not fishwife!

HE: I mean tree-troll!

SHE: Nor tree-troll!

HE: Woman! . . .

[*The scene darkens gradually. SHE nestles against his shoulder. Suddenly, she indicates the live oaks. HE follows her gesture doubtfully.*]

SHE: I'm afraid.

HE: Afraid?

Of the trees?

SHE: Not of the trees.

HE: Afraid of me?

SHE: Nor of you.

HE: Of what?

SHE: Of love!

HE: Of love?

SHE: Not of love!

HE: Not of love?

SHE: Of everything—

HE: Everything?—

SHE: Everything which isn't love!

HE: I don't understand? . . .

SHE: (*dreamily*):

I once saw two bubbles on a pond.
They eyed the sun a little while,
so contentedly,
then blinked one blink and were as nothing.
They died, didn't they?

HE: Doubtless they did—

SHE: Then I saw two gnats.

They sped back and forth across the pond,
so contentedly,
and then disappeared,
one behind a rock, the other down below,
and were as nothing.
They parted, didn't they?

HE: Doubtless they did—

SHE: I sat there with the past, present, future.

I thought of nothing.
But there was something in me,
a faint, wavering desire
for something beyond me
and that past, present, future—

HE: Here I am!

SHE: I know, but—

HE: But?

SHE: Will we be like the bubbles?

HE: No!

SHE: Like the gnats?

HE: No, no!

SHE: If we are the bubbles,
at least we would die—
but if we are the gnats!

HE: But we're going to live!

SHE: Live, yes, but—

HE: But again?—

SHE: There's a living which is dying.

HE: The everything which isn't love?

SHE: Yes!

HE: The everything in us which isn't?

SHE: Yes, yes!

HE: Is there such a thing in us?

SHE: My love!

HE: Your love?

SHE: And your love!

HE: My love?

SHE: I love the me in you—

and you the you in me!

HE: Is that what love is?

SHE: Can't it be something beyond—

more than the me—

more than the me we crave—

tell me what love is! . . .

[HE draws her still closer, and shakes his head. A gentle silence.]

SHE (*almost in a sing-song*):

If you'll tell me what love is,

how little of it is love,

how much of it, everything else,

how little of it, feeling for you,

how much of it, cat-like selfishness,

how much of it, lust of power,

luring the other into your hands

to remodel after your own image,

only to find the image mean,

commonplace, bitterly familiar,

a sight to efface with the first recognition—

HE (*in imitation*):

How much of it
is remodelling yourself to the other image,
what one supposes the other to be,
or rather what it should be, must be,
and one destroys not only the image,
but the reality as well—
if there is a reality in her for me,
if she is, not seems,
and I don't learn, as of old,
one asks her to be what one wants her to be—
is so much of oneself so unfriendly?

SHE: If you'll tell me the direction of it,
your saying, I love you,
my saying, I love you,
and the first apprehension of caresses—

HE: Desire and satiety—

SHE: Desire and satiety—

HE: How much of it will repeat past adventuring,
with the inevitable disclosure,
one is what one is—

SHE: And chance is what it is—

HE: The moon, sun, sea, hill, earth, tree or flower
playing circumstance
to what-he-is, what-she-is
and what-they-are-together
all over the world!

SHE: Dear—

so dear you are to me—
let us go on sitting so,
you there, I here,
under these dark, weird, clamorous trees,

until the first interruption,

until we find out—

HE: Though I can tell and you can tell,

we'll never find out till we try?

SHE: And should we try?

HE: Should we try—

SHE: Most likely because it's ever the fashion,

I'll know even less—

and you'll know even less—

HE: And I'll wonder why we tried,

and you'll wonder why we tried—

SHE: And I'll be more stupid,

and you'll be more stupid—

HE: And a little sadder—

SHE: And a little sadder—

HE: And a little lonelier—

SHE: And a little lonelier—

HE: And I'll sit down with some other—

SHE: And I'll sit down with some other—

HE: Just like this, just like that—

SHE: And we'll begin again—

if not from the beginning—

HE: And I'll recall you as I watch her,

and you, me as you watch him—

SHE: And I'll marvel and you'll marvel

that one's feeling—

HE: Is it the same, though not the same?—

SHE: And so on, and around, and back again.

HE: That's a beautiful sky through there—

southern skies are bluest of all,

and southern deserts

and southern seas

and southern clouds—

SHE: And that will be a beautiful sky—
northern skies are greenest of all,
and northern woods
and northern lakes
and the grass of the north—

HE: Or will it be eastern—
where will it be?

SHE: Dearest,
if you'll tell me what love is,
if you'll tell me it's ever so little,
a little outside the circle,
I'll butterfly chance with you
beyond these terrible trees—
and over the calm of the Pacific
to white-shawled China—

HE: Are the waves out there white-shawled?
Which is the mirage—
wave or shawl—
do you care?

SHE: Or sit just so—

HE: You there, I here—

SHE: Until—

HE: Until—
some tower-bell duty-call
find us asleep!

SHE: Or the sun blink us dead! . . .

* * * * *

[A few weeks later. The scenes are touched with the light of the moon. THE YOUNG MAN is walking about among the cedars. HE stops near a gravestone—of which there are several. They are small and old.]

Graveyards?

I suppose they are—
fun.

This fellow down here—
who—

whom did he love and—
she?

Did she—did she have cruel—
eyes?

Did she—oh those trees!

Why do they hunch their backs and—
sigh?

Did she—and that wind!

What makes him cramp his chest and—
groan?

And that sea, and the moon, those infernal
clouds—

Didn't she—didn't she love him at all?

And these white-eyed, white-eyed stones!

Graveyards?

I suppose they are—
when she loves you—
fun.

Ah to be able to die! . . .

[THE YOUNG WOMAN *appears*. THE YOUNG MAN *tries*
to retreat, but SHE sees him.

HE: You here?

SHE: And you?

HE: Then you must love me a little?

Come and tell me.

SHE: I'm afraid.

HE: Afraid of the stones?

SHE: Of the graves.

HE: Here's a stone which isn't a grave?

[SHE joins him. They sit down.

HE: How you have suffered!

SHE: And you!

HE: Am I not dear to you?

SHE: Yes, and I?

HE: You are so dear to me! . . .

[They draw closer.

HE: Isn't it best now

to give suffering its way with us,

like a sea with a stone,

and let the spray which was our joy—

the spray dancing on us

while bounding and tumbling and rolling

here—

give us content?

Suffering

carves smoothness

which cannot cut any longer,

should we roll again?

SHE: We will never roll again.

HE: We will!

SHE: Not with each other.

HE: With somebody else?

SHE: Nor somebody else.

HE: Not in the east?

SHE: Nor the north.

HE: We aren't bubbles—
we are alive!

SHE: Not for each other.

HE: We are here!—

What brought us?

SHE: Death.

HE: What estranged us?

SHE: I don't know.

HE: Why did you—

slip behind a rock?

SHE: I don't know.

HE: Did I do something?

SHE: No.

HE: Did you? Did we?

SHE: No.

HE: What estranged us?

SHE: What we didn't do—
love!

HE: We did love.

SHE: We loved—

ourselves. . . .

HE: What brought you here?

SHE: A burial.

HE: What burial?

SHE: I have come

from pride

all the way up to humility

this day-to-night.

The hill

was more terrible

than ever before.

This is the top;

there is the tall, slim tree.

It isn't bent; it doesn't lean;
it is only looking back.

At dawn,
under that tree,
still another me of mine
was buried.

Waiting for me to come again,
humorously solicitous
of what I bring next—
it looks down.

HE: Then you'll live again—
you are alive!

SHE: Everything which isn't love.

HE: Then you did love—

SHE: I did not, nor you—

HE: I did!

SHE: You loved yourself.

HE: And what lies buried here?

SHE: My self-love.

HE: But I loved

you,

I loved

you,

I loved—

SHE: You. . . .

[*Timidly, HE puts his arm about her. SHE does not resist. Two shadows take entity among the live oaks. They dance a dirge.*]

HE: Let memory have its way for a while!

[*SHE bows her head. The shadows move with a little animation; offer strange love to each other—frag-*]

ments of the lovers' life in Scene I. They dance, hand in hand; then well apart; then hand in hand; then far apart.

HE: Weren't our gifts—

SHE: Self-love.

HE: Our thoughts?

SHE: Self-love.

HE: Didn't we have—
each of the other—

SHE: We are
what we want.
We love
what we receive
of what we want.
Somewhere between
mountain and sea,
relation falls.

HE: What did you want?

SHE: Your me.

HE: And I?

SHE: My you. . . .

[HE bows his head. SHE notices the shadows.

SHE: Those people out there
moving about in mist,
dancing mist,
dancing blue-gray mist—
(or do they do the dancing?)—
he's always coming so close to her,
she's always going so close to him—
but they never touch.

HE: Don't you love them?

Queer beautiful things.

Mist people.

Moving mist people.

Dancing mist people.

You ought to—

you're one of them—

SHE: And you. . . .

[*The shadows vanish. SHE rises. HE rises; but does not detain her.*]

HE: Won't you come again?

SHE: Yes, but not here.

HE: Then I may hope—

SHE: The way I hope.

HE: Just to meet?

SHE: Just to meet.

HE: Ah, then we hope—

SHE: Together, yes.

Good night.

HE: Good night.

[*SHE leaves. HE speaks; and leaves in the opposite direction.*]

The me of me

I would have you love

is the one who thinks of you.

The mes of me

who growl their love

think of themselves.

Only your me

loves you.

In the night,
when they,
drunk brawling for you,
go to their cots,
he rises,
lights a candle,
and silently, bravely,
begins a new service. . . .

[*The man-shadow appears for a moment in Scene II, and suggests the reference to the lighting of a candle.*

* * * * *

[*It is early morning. THE YOUNG WOMAN may be seen under the eucalyptus. The man-shadow—Scene II—dances to her opening lines.*

He came,
that wistful child,
on his way to red,
deep red;
he came—
and they tried to tell me,
he was dawn.
He went,
that listless thing,
on his way to black,
deep black:
he went—
and they tried to tell me,
he was night. . . .

[THE YOUNG MAN *enters*. HE *comes forward without astonishment*. SHE *joins him*.

HE: I knew I would find you.

SHE: I knew you would come. . . .

[*They touch hands*. HE *looks up*. So does SHE. The woman-shadow joins the man-shadow in Scene II.

HE: In the great clouds there is rain.

A swift rain.

A rain that kills.

SHE: And a slow rain.

A rain that comes like leaves.

HE: I would be the slow rain.

SHE: In the hills there is a god
who rolls from side to side.

HE: In the valley, a no-god
who lifts his arms like a tree.

SHE: I would be the no-god.

HE: In the market, there are children.

And there are old people.

Very old people.

SHE: I wouldn't be the children,

but the old people,

the very old people.

HE: There is a woman.

Big with gentle yielding.

SHE: I would be like her. . . .

[HE *turns her towards the eucalyptus*.

HE: There's a tree not far away.

I think I could climb it.

And I know I'd like to climb it.

And there's a reason I'd like to climb it.
 Do you see the parasol of flowers?—
 that's half the reason—
 the other, I'm certain you'd like one.
 One of the flowers would do.
 It has delicate, Indian-red radii—

SHE: They spread from a cup of an olive shade—

HE: And the cup is hard, like an acorn—

SHE: And the outside turns

from olive green to faint amber to old rose—

HE: And the cup has a stem, like a darning
 needle,

olive green, faint amber, old rose,

a stem you can stick in your hair,

or slip in a slit of your bodice—

your hair is the proper shade,

and your bodice of lemon green.

Indeed, you could fancy the flower a parasol

and hold it over your head—

but your head, though small, would feel the
 sun!

SHE: Or the rain!

HE: The tree isn't far away.

I feel I could climb it.

But a thought hinders me.

I've dealt in flowers heretofore—

SHE: And in sea shells, and music,

and antiquated books, and coins,

and bowls, and nondescript trinkets—

HE: And in unseen gifts,

intangible things one hasn't a name for.

And the folk who took them—

SHE: Put them to strange uses,
devices you never intended.

HE: Often I gave them for the fun of giving—
not that giving we deem a virtue—

SHE: But that giving which is solace
against asking and receiving.

HE: Often I gave for the fun of receiving—
was that an evil receiving?

Often I gave without calculation—
at any rate, often I gave them.

SHE: And they fell into antics,
played upon by folk pranks of character—

HE: Pranks I'll never understand—

SHE: Born of misrepresentation—

HE: Innocent misrepresentation.

You know the misadventure—
there are lines, radii,
near your eyes and in your cheeks.

SHE: The tree isn't far away.

HE: And you'd like, at least, that Indian flower.

What shall I do?

SHE: Would intimacy come,
olive green, faint amber, old rose?

What would happen then?

HE: Lesser radii—
for the moment?

SHE: Deeper radii—
for all time?

HE: Would you have me—do? . . .

[SHE nods almost imperceptibly. It has begun, almost
imperceptibly, to rain. HE leads her under the tree.]

HE: Come and sit down—
if you aren't afraid?

SHE: I am not afraid!

HE: See, there are fallen flowers here.

SHE: You won't have to climb!

HE: I am tired.

SHE: Dear, sit down—

and I'll bring you a flower. . . .

[*After a tender pantomime of urging and resistance,
SHE makes him sit down, and brings him a flower.
HE, too, has found one; so they exchange.*

SHE: This isn't the north?

HE: Yet it's green here!

SHE: And I'll sit down with some other—

HE: And I'll sit down with some other—

SHE: Just like this—

HE: Just like that—

[*They laugh quietly.*

HE: And we'll begin again—

SHE: If not from the beginning—

HE: And I'll recall you—

SHE: And I'll recall you—

HE: And I'll marvel—

SHE: That one's feeling—

HE: Is it the same, though not the same?

SHE: It's a little sadder—

HE: It's a little sadder?

SHE: And a little lonelier—

HE: And a little lonelier?

SHE: I can't breathe, can't live—

HE: Without me?

SHE: Without *me*!

HE: Am I your *me*?

SHE: And I yours!

HE: Still?

SHE: Still! . . .

[They laugh again, and embrace tenderly.]

HE: And what shall we do for our *you*?

SHE: There is no *you*—

HE: But suppose

your *me*

and my *you*—

suppose your *me*

and my *you*—

SHE: Have a little *you*?

HE: Have a little *you*! . . .

[SHE rises; HE rises. SHE leads him from the tree. It has stopped raining. The shadows have vanished from Scene II.]

SHE: Let us go.

HE: Which way?

SHE: This way.

HE: That way?

SHE: And beyond.

HE: And beyond?

SHE: Towards *you*!

HE: And *you*!

[Arm in arm, they disappear. The shadows come for a moment into Scene III, and dance an ethereal movement, suggesting an apotheosis of the last motive. Curtain.]

MANIKIN AND MINIKIN

MANIKIN AND MINIKIN *

(A Bisque-Play)

Seen through an oval frame, one of the walls of a parlor. The wallpaper is a conventionalized pattern. Only the shelf of the mantelpiece shows. At each end, seated on pedestals turned slightly away from one another, two aristocratic bisque figures, A BOY in delicate cerise and A GIRL in cornflower blue. Their shadows join in a grotesque silhouette. In the center, an ancient clock whose tick acts as the metronome for the sound of their high voices. Presently, the mouths of the figures open and shut after the mode of ordinary conversation.

SHE: Manikin!

HE: Minikin?

SHE: That fool of a servant has done it again.

HE: I should say, she's more than a fool.

SHE: A meddlesome busybody—

HE: A brittle-fingered noddy!

SHE: Which way are you looking? What do you see?

HE: The everlasting armchair,

the everlasting tiger skin,

the everlasting yellow, green and purple books,

the everlasting portrait of milord—

SHE: Oh these Yankees!—and I see

the everlasting rattan rocker,

the everlasting samovar,

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the everlasting noisy piano,
the everlasting portrait of milady—

HE: Simpering spectacle!

SHE: What does she want, always dusting?

HE: I should say—

that is, I'd consider the thought—

SHE: You'd consider a lie—

oh Manikin—

you're trying to defend her!

HE: I'm not defending her—

SHE: You're trying to—

HE: I'm not trying to—

SHE: Then what are you trying to—

HE: Well, I'd venture to say,

if she'd only stay away some morning—

SHE: That's what I say in my dreams!

HE: She and her broom—

SHE: Her everlasting broom—

HE: She wouldn't be sweeping—

SHE: Every corner, every cranny, every crevice—

HE: And the dust wouldn't move—

SHE: Wouldn't crawl, wouldn't rise, wouldn't fly—

HE: And cover us all over—

SHE: Like a spider-web—ugh!

HE: Everlasting dust has been most of our life—

SHE: Everlasting years and years of dust!

HE: You on your lovely blue gown—

SHE: And you on your manly pink cloak.

HE: If she didn't sweep, we wouldn't need dusting—

SHE: Nor need taking down, I should say—

HE: With her stupid, clumsy hands—

SHE: Her crooked, monkey paws—

HE: And we wouldn't need putting back—

SHE: I with my back to you—

HE: I with my back to you. . . .

SHE: It's been hours, days, weeks—

by the sound of that everlasting clock—

and the coming of day and the going of day—

since I saw you last!

HE: What's the use of the sun

with its butterfly wings of light—

what's the use of a sun made to see by—

if I can't see you!

SHE: Manikin!

HE: Minikin?

SHE: Say that again!

HE: Why should I say it again—don't you know?

SHE: I know, but sometimes I doubt—

HE: Why do you, what do you doubt?

SHE: Please say it again!

HE: What's the use of a sun—

SHE: What's the use of a sun?

HE: That was made to see by—

SHE: That was made to see by?

HE: If I can't see you!

SHE: Oh, Manikin!

HE: Minikin?

SHE: If you hadn't said that again,

my doubt would have filled a balloon.

HE: Your doubt, which doubt, what doubt?

SHE: And although I can't move,

although I can't move unless somebody shoves me,

one of these days when the sun isn't here,

I would have slipped over the edge

of this everlasting shelf—

HE: Minikin!

SHE: And fallen to that everlasting floor
into so many fragments,
they'd never paste Minikin together again!

HE: Minikin, Minikin!

SHE: They'd have to set another here—
some Ninikin, I'm assured!

HE: Why do you chatter so, prattle so?

SHE: Because of my doubt—
because I'm as positive as I am
that I sit here with my knees in a knot—
that that human creature—loves you.

HE: Loves me?

SHE: And you her!

HE: Minikin!

SHE: When she takes us down she holds you much
longer.

HE: Minikin!

SHE: I'm sufficiently feminine—
and certainly old enough—
I and my hundred and seventy years—
I can see, I can feel
by her manner of touching me
and her flicking me with her mop—
the creature hates me—
she'd like to drop me, that's what she would!

HE: Minikin!

SHE: Don't you venture defending her!
Booby—you don't know live women!
When I'm in the right position
I can note how she fondles you,
pets you like a parrot with her finger tip,
blows a pinch of dust from your eye
with her softest breath,

holds you off at arm's length
and fixes you with her spider look,
actually holds you against her cheek—
her rose-tinted cheek—
before she releases you!
If she didn't turn us apart so often,
I wouldn't charge her with insinuation;
but now I know she loves you—
she's as jealous as I am—
and poor dead me in her live power!
Manikin?

HE: Minikin?

SHE: If you could see me—
the way you see her—

HE: But I see you—
see you always—
see only you!

SHE: If you could see me
the way you see her,
you'd still love me,
you'd love me the way you do her!
Who made me what I am?

Who dreamed me in motionless clay?

HE: Minikin?

SHE: Manikin?

HE: Will you listen to me?

SHE: No!

HE: Will you listen to me?

SHE: No!

HE: Will you listen to me?

SHE: Yes.

HE: I love you—

SHE: No!

HE: I've always loved you—

SHE: No.

HE: You doubt that?

SHE: Yes!

HE: You doubt that?

SHE: Yes.

HE: You doubt that?

SHE: No.

You've always loved me—

yes—

but you don't love me now—

no—

not since that rose-face encountered your glance—

no.

HE: Minikin!

SHE: If I could move about the way she can—

if I had feet—

dainty white feet which could twinkle and twirl—

I'd dance you so prettily

you'd think me a sun butterfly—

if I could let down my hair

and prove you it's longer than larch hair—

if I could raise my black brows

or shrug my narrow shoulders,

like a queen or a countess—

if I could turn my head, tilt my head,

this way and that, like a swan—

ogle my eyes, like a peacock,

till you'd marvel,

they're green, nay, violet, nay, yellow, nay, gold—

If I could move, only move

just the moment of an inch—

you would see what I could be!

It's a change, it's a change,
you men ask of women!

HE: A change?

SHE: You're eye-sick, heart-sick
of seeing the same foolish porcelain thing,
a hundred years old,
a hundred and fifty,
and sixty, and seventy—
I don't know how old I am!

HE: Not an exhalation older than I—
not an inhalation younger!
Minikin?

SHE: Manikin?

HE: Will you listen to me?

SHE: No!

HE: Will you listen to me?

SHE: No.

HE: Will you listen to me?

SHE: Yes.

HE: I don't love that creature—

SHE: You do.

HE: I can't love that creature—

SHE: You can.

HE: Will you listen to me?

SHE: Yes—

if you'll tell me—

if you'll prove me—

so my last particle of dust—

the tiniest speck of a molecule—

the merest electron—

HE: Are you listening?

SHE: Yes!

HE: To begin with—

I dislike, suspect, deplore—

I had best say, feel compassion

for what is called, humanity—

or the animate, as opposed to the inanimate—

SHE: You say that so wisely—

you're such a philosopher—

say it again!

HE: That which is able to move

can never be steadfast, you understand?

Let us consider the creature at hand

to whom you have referred

with an undue excess of admiration

adulterated with an undue excess of envy—

SHE: Say that again!

HE: To begin with—

I can only see part of her at once.

She moves into my vision;

she moves out of my vision;

she is doomed to be wayward.

SHE: Yes, but that which you see of her—

HE: Is ugly, commonplace, unsightly.

Her face a rose-face?—

it's veined with blood and the skin of it wrinkles—

her eyes are ever so near to a hen's—

her movements,

if one would pay such a gait with regard—

her gait is unspeakably ungainly—

her hair—

SHE: Her hair?

HE: Luckily I've never seen it down—

I daresay it comes down in the dark,

when it looks, most assuredly, like tangled weeds—

SHE: Again, Manikin, that dulcet phrase!

HE: Even were she beautiful,
she were never so beautiful as thou!

SHE: Now you're a poet, Manikin!

HE: Even were she so beautiful as thou—
lending her your eyes,
and the exquisite head which holds them—
like a cup two last beads of wine,
like a stone two last drops of rain,
green, nay, violet, nay, yellow, nay, gold—

SHE: Faster, Manikin!

HE: I can't, Minikin!
Words were never given to man
to phrase such a one as you are—
inanimate symbols
can never embrace, embody, hold
the animate dream that you are—
I must cease.

SHE: Manikin!

HE: And even were she so beautiful as thou,
she couldn't stay beautiful.

SHE: Stay beautiful?

HE: Humans change with each going moment.

That is a gray-haired platitude.

Just as I can see that creature
only when she touches my vision,
so I could only see her once, were she beautiful—
at best, twice, or thrice—
you're more precious than when you came!

SHE: And you!

HE: Human pathos penetrates still deeper
when one determines their inner life,

as we've pondered their outer.

Their inner changes far more desperately.

SHE: How so, wise Manikin?

HE: They have what philosophy terms, moods,
and moods are more pervious to modulation
than pools to idle breezes.

These people may say, to begin with—

I love you.

This may be true, I'm assured—

as true as when *we* say, I love you.

But they can only say,

I love you,

so long as the mood breathes,

so long as the breezes blow,

so long as water remains wet.

They are honest—

they mean what they say—

passionately, tenaciously, tragically—

but when the mood languishes,

they have to say,

if it be they are honest—

I do not love you.

Or they have to say,

I love you,

to somebody else.

SHE: To somebody else?

HE: Now, you and I—

we've said that to each other—

we've had to say it

for a hundred and seventy years—

and we'll have to say it, always.

SHE: Say always again!

HE: The life of an animate—

SHE: Say always again!

HE: Always!

The life of an animate
is a procession of deaths
with but a secret sorrowing candle,
guttering lower and lower,
on the path to the grave—
the life of an animate
is as serenely enduring—
as all still things are.

SHE: Still things?

HE: Recall our childhood in the English museum—
ere we were moved,
from place to place,
to this dreadful Yankee salon—
do you remember
that little old Greek tanagra
of the girl with a head like a bud—
that little old Roman medallion
of the girl with a head like a—

SHE: Manikin, Manikin—
were they so beautiful as I—
did you love them, too—
why do you bring them back?

HE: They were not so beautiful as thou—
I spoke of them—
recalled, designated them—
well, because they were ages old—
and—and—

SHE: And—and?

HE: And we might live as long as they—
as they did and do!
I hinted their existence

because they're not so beautiful as thou,
so that by contrast and deduction—

SHE: And deduction?

HE: You know what I'd say—

SHE: But say it again!

HE: I love you.

SHE: Manikin?

HE: Minikin?

SHE: Then even though that creature has turned us
apart,

can you see me?

HE: I can see you.

SHE: Even though you haven't seen me
for hours, days, weeks—
with your dear blue eyes—
you can see me—
with your hidden ones?

HE: I can see you.

SHE: Even though you are still,
and calm, and smooth,
and lovely outside—
you aren't still and calm
and smooth and lovely inside?

HE: Lovely, yes—

but not still and calm and smooth! . . .

SHE: Which way are you looking? What do you see?

HE: I look at you.

I see you.

SHE: And if that fool of a servant—
oh, Manikin—

suppose she should break the future—
our great, happy centuries ahead—
by dropping me, throwing me down?

HE: I should take an immediate step
off this everlasting shelf—

SHE: But you cannot move!

HE: The good wind would give me a blow!

SHE: Now you're a punster!

And what would your fragments do?

HE: They'd do what Manikin did.

SHE: Say that again!

HE: They'd do what Manikin did. . . .

SHE: Manikin?

HE: Minikin?

SHE: Shall I tell you something?

HE: Tell me something.

SHE: Are you listening?

HE: With my inner ears.

SHE: I wasn't jealous of that woman—

HE: You weren't jealous?

SHE: I wanted to hear you talk—

HE: You wanted to hear me talk?

SHE: You talk so wonderfully!

HE: Do I, indeed? What a booby I am!

SHE: And I wanted to hear you say—

HE: You cheat, you idler, you—

SHE: Woman—

HE: Dissembler!

SHE: Manikin?

HE: Minikin?

SHE: Everlastingly?

HE: Everlastingly.

SHE: Say it again!

HE: I refuse—

SHE: You refuse?

HE: Well—

SHE: Well?

HE: You have ears outside your head—

I'll say that for you—

but they'll never hear—

what your other ears hear!

SHE: Say it—

down one of the ears—

outside my head?

HE: I refuse.

SHE: You refuse?

HE: Leave me alone.

SHE: Manikin?

HE: I can't say it!

SHE: Manikin!

*[The clock goes on ticking for a moment. Its mellow
chimes strike the hour. Curtain.]*

JACK'S HOUSE

JACK'S HOUSE *

(A Cubic-Play)

Before the rise of the curtain, a fantastic cartoon in a design of squares, triangles, rhomboids, etc., JACK is singing lustily:

I-re-mi-fa-sol-fa-mi-
love-her-mi-fa-sol-la-sol-fa-
and-she-sol-la-ci-do-ci-la-
loves-ci-do-ci-la-sol-fa-mi-
loves-me-re-mi-re-do-
And-we-re-mi-fa-sol-fa-mi-
love-us-re-mi-fa-mi-we-do.

After a short silence, the curtain rises—disclosing one small room. It contains one table, one chair, one couch, one cooking stove, on which one kettle is boiling—all of them small, except the chair. It has one bare window, one door—both small. Also one broom—which is large. JACK is sitting behind the table. Large square-rimmed spectacles rest on the tip of his nose as he studies a page of a ponderous volume across which may be read the words, HOUSEHOLD ACCOUNTS. Throughout the play, JACK'S WIFE does not speak; the character of her dialogue is suggested by her pantomime. JACK addresses practically the whole of his speech to the audience. His gesticulation is geometri-

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cal. As the play progresses, HIS WIFE begins unconsciously to imitate him.

Two and two are four,
four and six are ten,
ten and two are twelve,
twelve and nine are twenty-one—
twenty-one—
Wife is only twenty—
twenty-one—
twenty-one and seven—
oh how I hope—
twenty-one and seven—
twenty-nine—
oh how I hope—
carry two—
I hope she'll do the housework soon.
Two and three are five,
five and four are nine—
mending cushions—
nine and one—
curtains—I wonder will she—
nine and one—
meals—I wonder will—
and one is ten and two is twelve and nine—
house without housework is no house at all—
twenty-one again—
carry two.
Two and four is—

[JACK is interrupted by the sound of a step. He shuts the book, quickly puts it away in the drawer of the table, hurries to the kettle and begins to stir its con-

tents with a large wooden spoon. JACK'S WIFE enters. Adorable—might describe her. Dainty pantomime of greetings. JACK is most solicitous in aiding her with the removal of her hat. Presently, he leads her to two unfinished cushions which lie on the couch, and indicates that she should busy herself with them. She stubbornly shakes her head. He indicates some yellow curtains—likewise on the couch. She is still more stubborn. He indicates the wooden spoon, and stirs the contents of the kettle with truly magic persuasiveness. She turns her back on him. He leads her gently to the table, opens the drawer and indulges a pantomime of setting the table. She refuses the invitation. JACK seems in despair, but a sign of extraordinary good cheer not unmingled with whimsical shrewdness, breaks his mood. He takes HIS WIFE'S hands, and intones:

Love, liebe, amore, amour
was a dear little word
for to win a lady,
love, liebe, amore, amour
was a dear little word
for to win a lord.
Now take her hand,
and you take his,
and move about in a quaint little rhomboid,
or move about in a square or circle —
a square or circle is pretty, my dears!
Shall it be a valse,
or shall it be a saraband?
Why not try a minuet,
gigue or polonaise?

Don't you mind false steps,
or who plays accompaniment—
the dear little tune is ever the same:
Love, liebe, amore, amour
is a dear little word
for to hold a lady,
love, liebe, amore, amour
is a dear little word
for to hold a lord.

[*Before the close of the dance, it becomes evident that JACK'S WIFE is more responsive to his suggestions. He leads her back to the table; this time he takes various imaginary articles, carefully, one by one, from the drawer. Reluctantly, only, does she place them as he indicates. It is easy to intimate that if the articles were real, instead of imaginary, she would have denied her share in the performance.*

We have no dishes
to eat our meals from.
We have no dishes
to eat our meals from
because we have no dishes
to eat our meals from.
We have no dishes
to eat our meals from
because we can afford no
dishes to eat our meals from.
When we can afford
dishes to eat our meals from
we will have dishes
to eat our meals from.

We need no dishes
to eat our meals from,
we have fingers
to eat our meals from.

[JACK challenges the audience with a vehement nod. HIS WIFE does the same with a nod less vehement. He places the chair ceremoniously for her to sit on, and returns to the kettle. Presently he brings the imaginary repast, sets it on the table, and after much lofty manœuvring of helpings, sits down on the same chair, as HIS WIFE makes room for him with tender alacrity. Imaginary eating follows. JACK, with a deal of scorn:

We have a one-room home.
You have a two-room, three-room, four-room.
We have a one-room home
because a one-room home *holds* all we have.
We have a one-room home
because we do not want
a two-room, three-room, four-room.
If we had a two-room, three-room, four-room
we would need more than a one-room home.
We have a one-room home.
We *like* a one-room home.

[Apparently, JACK'S WIFE acquiesces in this pronouncement. But as JACK rises and indicates the presence of the next household problem, she rises and backs away from the table. He illustrates his argument by going from table to kettle and back again, carrying the imaginary dishes—but without prevailing.

He turns his back on her. Slowly, laboriously, he stirs the dishes with a mop. But ever so gently, ever so impersonally and tactfully, he sings to himself:

I-re-mi-fa-sol-fa-mi-
love-her-mi-fa-sol-la-sol-fa-
and-she-sol-la-ci-do-ci-la—

[*Unseen by JACK, HIS WIFE has wandered to the window. Idly, like a child, and nodding in tempo, she traces shapes with her finger. She stops, eyes JACK, looks down, looks up, and then moves towards the couch. He recommences, as though unaware of a change:*

I-re-mi-fa-sol-fa-mi-
love-her-mi-fa-sol-la-sol-fa-
and-she-sol-la-ci-do-ci-la—

[*HIS WIFE falters, and then sits down. She begins, most tentatively, to finger one of the cushions.*

And-she-sol-la-ci-do-ci-la?

[*They exchange sidelong glances. JACK smiles; so does HIS WIFE. He quickens the tempo of his tune and goes to the drawer:*

loves-ci-do-ci-la-sol-fa-mi?

[*He sends her a glance. She nods and he pulls open the drawer and gets her work basket:*

loves-ci-do-ci-la-sol-fa-mi-
loves-me-re-mi-re-do—

[*He hands her the basket with a touch of legerdemain:*

loves-me-re-mi-re-do.
And-we-re-mi-fa-sol-fa-mi-
love-us-re-mi-fa-mi-we-do.

[JACK goes back to the kettle. HIS WIFE begins to work on the cushions. He has to send her occasional glances of encouragement. Presently, he takes the broom, and, with what looks like obliviousness, sweeps with such vigorous strokes and such delicate finesse that a little pile of dust is gathered and deftly urged into a corner. With much twirling of the broom, and interruptions by way of bowing to the audience, gesticulating and posturing, he has been offering the following, at the conclusion of which the broom is put away with an ecstatic sigh.

She has two green pillows
on our black couch.
They should be cerulean bolsters
on a lemon silk divan
and you would not
challenge me that
she has two green pillows
on our black couch,
and I would not
challenge you that *yours*
has cerulean bolsters
on your lemon silk divan.

Have cerulean bolsters
on your lemon silk divan
and let us have
two green pillows
on our black couch.

[*HIS WIFE seems not a little pleased with herself, so much so that when JACK sits down to help her with advice, she nudges him away. He can scarcely control his joy. To hide it, he concerns himself with imaginary chores, to a hummed version of his tune. Observing that his WIFE has laid aside the cushions, he silyly attempts to pick up the curtains, but she snatches them away. He indulges a pantomime of angry, defeated pride, and then resorts to petting the pillows. HIS WIFE does not object. He rocks the pillows in his arms, and attacks the audience with insinuating tenderness.*

We have many, many children
I would sing you of,
but you would not call
them any, any children.
And what is it to you how
many, many children we have,
so—why should I sing you of
any, any children we have?

[*JACK lays the pillows down. HIS WIFE begins sewing on the curtains. Tactfully, he renews his search for imagined chores. She motions him towards the window, and suggests washing it. JACK is so surprised she has to repeat her pointing several times. He*

nods in approbation, finds the mop and dips it in the kettle. The water is hot, assuredly. However, a glance of his, followed by a slow look, at the window, holds him back. With a gesture akin to reverence, he turns from the window, and comes close to the audience. In strict, prayerful confidence, to which HIS WIFE listens, doubtfully, and then slowly bows her head, and sews.

Our window is stained
with the figures she has blown on it.

Our window is stained
with the figures she has blown on it
with her breath.

Our window is stained
with the figures she has blown on it
with her breath

on which a spirit has blown—

A spirit? a saint? a sprite?

who was it

blew figures on her breath

that our window is stained

with the figures she has blown on it?

[JACK goes back to the window, but he exerts extreme care in his efforts not to wipe out the figures. HIS WIFE has finished the curtains; she steals behind him. JACK stands there in utter contemplation, but as she approaches, comes back to the situation and tries to anticipate her purpose by taking the curtains. She bluntly denies him any part in the hanging. With mock resignation JACK permits himself to be over-

ruled. But while HIS WIFE hangs the curtains, he confides his ecstasy to the audience.

She *likes* to make shades,
yellow shades for the window,
but if you ask her why
she likes to make shades,
yellow shades for the window,
she would not tell you why
she likes to make shades,
yellow shades for the window,
except that she likes to.
If you ask *me* why
she likes to make shades,
yellow shades for the window,
I could tell you why,
but you might think me proud,
so I will not tell you why
she likes to make shades,
yellow shades for the window.

[HIS WIFE has finished hanging the curtains. She steals behind and touches him. JACK turns and lifts her gently off the floor, for a mere moment. His happy exhaustion becomes so apparent that HIS WIFE has to lead him to the couch and deposit him there—almost like a child. He does not resist. She snuggles down beside him. Together, they look about the room. JACK, to HIS WIFE:

This room
is our cradle.
It will rock

in our memory
no matter what
we grow to.

[As the curtain falls, they can be heard humming the strain of I-re-mi-fa-sol-fa-mi.]

LIMA BEANS

LIMA BEANS*

(A Scherzo-Play)

The characters are four: HUSBAND, WIFE, THE VOICE OF A HUCKSTER and—THE CURTAIN! HUSBAND and WIFE might be two marionettes. The scene is a miniature dining-room large enough to contain a small table, two chairs, a tiny sideboard, an open window, a closed door leading to the other rooms, and additional elbow space. Pantomime is modestly indulged in by HUSBAND and WIFE, suggesting in inoffensive parody, unless the author errs, of the contours of certain ancient Burmese dances. The impedimenta of occasional rhymes are unpremeditated. If there must be a prelude of music, let it be nothing more consequential than one of the innocuous parlor rondos of Carl Maria Von Weber. As a background color scheme, black and white might not prove amiss.

As the curtain, which is painted in festoons of vegetables, rises gravely, THE WIFE is disclosed setting the table for dinner. Aided by the sideboard, SHE has attended to her place, as witness the neat arrangement of plate, cup and saucer, and knife, fork and spoons at one side. Now, more consciously, SHE begins the performance of the important duty opposite. This question of concrete paraphernalia, and the action consequent thereupon, might of course be left entirely to the imagination of the beholder.

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THE WIFE (*wistfully whimsical*):

Put a knife here,
place a fork there—
marriage is greater than love,
Give him a large spoon,
give him a small—
you're sure of your man when you dine him.
A cup for his coffee,
a saucer for spillings,
a plate rimmed with roses
to hold his night's fillings—
roses for hearts, ah,
but food for the appetite!
Mammals are happiest home after dark!

[*The rite over, SHE stands off in critical admiration, her arms akimbo, her head bobbing from side to side. Then, seriously, as SHE eyes THE HUSBAND'S dinner plate.*

But what shall I give him to eat to-night?
It mustn't be limas,
we've always had limas—
one more lima would shatter his love!

[*An answer comes through the open window from the dulcet insinuatingly persuasive HORN OF THE HUCKSTER.*

THE WIFE: Oh, ah, ooh!

THE HUCKSTER (*singing mysteriously*):

I got tomatoes,
I got potatoes,

I got new cabbages,
I got cauliflower,
I got red beets,
I got onions,
I got lima beans—

THE WIFE (*who has stolen to the window, fascinated*):
Any fruit?

THE HUCKSTER:

I got oranges,
I got pineapples,
blackberries,
currants,
blueberries,
I got bananas,
I got—

THE WIFE: Bring me some string beans!

THE HUCKSTER: Yes, mam! (*His head bobs in at the window.*)

[THE WIFE takes some coins from the sideboard. A paper bag is flung into the room. THE WIFE catches it and airily tosses the coins into the street. Presently, SHE takes a bowl from the sideboard, sits down, peeps into the bag, dramatically tears it open, and relapses into a gentle rocking as she strings the beans to this invocation:

String the crooked ones,
string the straight—
love needs a change every meal.
To-morrow, come kidney beans,
Wednesday, come white or black—
limas, return not too soon!

The string bean rules in the
vegetable kingdom,
gives far more calories, sooner digests—
love through with dinner is quicker to play!
Straight ones, crooked ones,
string beans are blessed!

[*Enter THE HUSBAND briskly. In consternation, THE WIFE tries to hide the bowl, but sets it on the table and hurries to greet him. HE spreads his hands and bows.*

SHE: Good evening, sweet husband!

HE: Good evening, sweet wife!

SHE: You're back, I'm so happy—

HE: So am I—'twas a day—

SHE: 'Twas a day?

HE: For a hot sweating donkey—

SHE: A donkey?

HE: A mule!

SHE: My poor, dear, poor spouse—

HE: No, no, my good mouse—

SHE: Rest your tired, weary arms—

HE: They're not tired, I'm not weary—

I'd perspire tears and blood drops
just to keep my mouse in cheese.

In a town or in the fields,
on the sea or in a balloon,
with a pickaxe or a fiddle,
with one's back a crooked wish-bone,
occupation, labour, work—
work's a man's best contribution.

SHE: Contribution?

HE: Yes, to Hymen!

SHE: Ah yes—

HE: But you haven't—

SHE: I haven't?

HE: You haven't—

SHE: I haven't?

HE: You have *not*—

SHE: Ah yes, yes indeed!

[THE WIFE *embraces* THE HUSBAND *and kisses him daintily six times.*

HE: Stop, queer little dear!

Why is a kiss?

SHE: I don't know.

HE: You don't?

SHE: No!

HE: Then why do you do it?

SHE: Love!

HE: Love?

SHE: Yes!

HE: And why is love?

SHE: I don't know.

HE: You don't?

SHE: No!

HE: And why don't you know?

SHE: Because!

HE: Because?

SHE: Yes!

HE: Come, queer little dear!

[THE HUSBAND *embraces* THE WIFE *and kisses her daintily six times.*

HE (*solemnly*): And now!

SHE (*nervously*): And now?

HE: And now!

SHE: And now?

HE: And now I am hungry.

SHE: And now you are hungry?

HE: Of course I am hungry.

SHE: To be sure you are hungry, but—

HE: But?

SHE: But!

HE: But?

[THE WIFE *tries to edge between* THE HUSBAND *and the table. HE gently elbows her aside. SHE comes back; HE elbows her less gently. This pantomime is repeated several times; his elbowing is almost rough at the last. THE HUSBAND reaches the table and ogles the bowl. His head twists from the bowl to THE WIFE, back and forth. An ominous silence.*

HE: String beans?

SHE: String beans!

HE: String beans?

SHE: String beans!

[*A still more ominous silence. THE HUSBAND'S head begins fairly to bob, only to stop abruptly as HE breaks forth:*

HE: I perspire tears and blood drops
in a town or in the fields,
on the sea or in a balloon,
with my pickaxe or my fiddle,

just to come home
footsore, starving, doubled with appetite
to a meal of—string beans?

Where are my limas?

SHE: We had—

HE: We had?

SHE: Lima beans yesterday—we had them—

HE: We had them?

SHE: Day before yesterday—

HE: What of it?

SHE: Last Friday, last Thursday—

HE: I know it—

SHE: Last Wednesday, last Tuesday—

HE: What then, mam?

SHE: We had them

all the way since we were married—

HE: Two weeks ago this very day—

SHE: I thought you'd have to have a change—

HE: A change—

SHE: I thought you'd like to have a change—

HE: A change?

You thought?

I'd like?

A change?

What!

From the godliest of vegetables,
my kingly bean,
that soft, soothing,
succulent, caressing,
creamy, persuasively serene,
my buttery entity?
You would dethrone it?
You would play renegade?

You'd raise a usurper
in the person of this
elongated, cadaverous,
throat-scratching, greenish
caterpillar—
you'd honour a parochial,
menial pleb,
an accursed legume,
sans even the petty grandeur
of cauliflower,
radish, pea,
onion, asparagus,
potato, tomato—
to the rank of household god?
Is this your marriage?
Is this your creed of love?
Is this your contribution?
Dear, dear,
was there some witch at the altar
who linked your hand with mine in troth
only to have it broken in a bowl?
Ah, dear, dear—

SHE: Dear, dear!

HE: You have listened to a temptress—

SHE: I have listened to my love of you—

HE: You, the pure, the angelic—

SHE: Husband, dear—

HE: Silence!

SHE: Husband!

HE: Silence!

[THE WIFE *collapses into her chair.* THE HUSBAND
seizes the bowl to this malediction:

Worms,
snakes,
reptiles,
caterpillars,
I do not know from whence ye came,
but I know whither ye shall go.
My love,
my troth,
my faith
shall deal with ye.
Avaunt,
vanish
begone
from this domicile,
dedicated,
consecrated,
immortalised
in the name of Hymen!
Begone!

[THE HUSBAND *throws the bowl and beans out of the window. The customary crash of broken glass, off-stage, is heard. A smothered sob escapes THE WIFE. THE HUSBAND strides towards the door. THE WIFE raises her head.*

SHE: Husband!

HE: Traitress!

SHE: Love, sweet husband!

HE: Traitress, traitress!

[THE HUSBAND *glares at THE WIFE, and slams the door behind him. THE WIFE collapses again. Her body*

rocks to and fro. Silence. Then, still more mysteriously than the first time, THE HORN and the VOICE OF THE HUCKSTER. THE WIFE stops rocking, raises her head and gets up. A woebegone expression vanishes before one of eagerness, of housewifely shrewdness, of joy. SHE steals to the window.

THE HUCKSTER: I got oranges,

I got pineapples,

I got blackberries,

I got currants,

I got blueberries,

I got bananas,

I got—

THE WIFE: Any vegetables?

THE HUCKSTER: I got tomatoes,

I got potatoes,

new cabbages,

cauliflower,

red beets,

I got *string* beans,

I got—

THE WIFE: Bring me some lima beans!

THE HUCKSTER: I got onions,

I got—

THE WIFE: Bring me some lima beans!

THE HUCKSTER: Yes, mam! (*His head appears again.*)

[*The performance of paper bag and coins is repeated. Excitedly THE WIFE takes another bowl from the sideboard. SHE sits down, tears open the bag, clicks her heels, and hastily, recklessly, begins split-*

ting the limas. One or two pop out and bound along the floor. THE WIFE stops. *Pensively:*

There you go,
hopping away,
just like bad sparrows—
no, no, more like him.

(SHE *smiles a little.*)

Hopping away,
no, he's not a sparrow,
he's more like a
poor angry boy—and so soon!

(SHE *lets the beans slip through her fingers.*)

Lima beans, string beans,
kidney beans, white or black—
you're all alike—
though not all alike to him.

(SHE *perks her head.*)

It's alike to me
what's alike to him—

(SHE *looks out of the window.*)

though I'm sorry for you,
crooked strings, straight strings,
and so glad for you,
creamy ones, succulent—
what did he say of you?

(SHE *returns to splitting the limas; with crescendo animation.*)

Heighho, it's all one to me,
so he loves what I do,
I'll do what he loves.
Angry boy? No, a man

quite young in the practice
of wedlock—and love!
Come, limas, to work now—
we'll serve him, heart, appetite,
whims, crosspatches and all—
though we boil for it later!
The dinner bell calls us,
ding, dong, ding, dell!

[THE HUSBAND *opens the door and pokes in his head.*
THE WIFE *hears him and is silent.* HE *edges into the*
room and then stops, humble, contrite, abject. Al-
most in a whisper:

Wife!

(SHE *does not heed him.* HE, *louder:*)

Sweet wife!

(SHE *does not answer.* HE, *still louder:*)

Beloved,
dear, dearest wife!

[SHE *does not answer.* HE *approaches carefully, almost*
with reverence, watches her, takes the other chair and
cautiously sets it down next to hers.

HE: Wife!

SHE: Yes?

HE: Will you—

I want you—

won't you—

may I sit next to you?

SHE: Yes.

HE: I want to—

will you—

won't you
forgive me—I'll
eat all the beans in the world!

[THE WIFE looks up at THE HUSBAND roguishly. HE drops down beside her with the evident intention of putting his arm about her, only to jump up as, inadvertently, HE has looked into the bowl. HE rubs his eyes, sits down slowly, looks again, only to jump up again. The third time HE sits down with extreme caution, like a zoologist who has come upon a new specimen of insect. THE WIFE seems oblivious of his emotion. HE rises, looks from one side of her, then the other, warily. At last, rapturously:

HE: Lima beans?

[SHE looks up tenderly and invitingly, indicating his chair.

SHE: Lima beans!

[HE sits down beside her. With greater awe and emphasis:

HE: Lima beans?

SHE: Lima beans!

[A moment of elfin silence.

HE: Sweet wife!

SHE: Sweet husband!

HE: Where—

whence—

how did it—

how did it happen?

SHE: I don't know.

HE: You do—

you do know—

SHE: I don't!

HE: Tiny miracle,

you do—

you're a woman,

you're a wife,

you're an imp—

you do know!

SHE: Well—

HE: Well?

SHE: Er—

HE: Eh?

SHE: Somebody—

HE: Yes, yes?

SHE: Somebody—

sent them—

HE: Sent them?

SHE: Brought them!

HE: Brought them?

SHE: Yes!

HE: Who?

SHE: Somebody!

HE: Somebody who?

SHE: I can't tell—

HE: You can.

SHE: I—won't tell—

HE: You will—

SHE: I won't—

HE: You will—

SHE: Well!

HE: Well?

SHE: You ought to know!

HE: I ought to?

SHE: You ought to—

HE: But I don't—

SHE: Yes, you do!

HE: I do not—

SHE: You do!

[THE HUSBAND *eyes* THE WIFE *thoughtfully*. SHE *aids* him *with a gently mischievous smile*. HE *smiles back* in *understanding*.

HE: I know!

SHE: You do not—

HE: Yes, I do!

SHE: Are you sure?

HE: Sure enough—

SHE: Who was it?

HE: I won't tell—

SHE: You will!

[HE *points at the audience with warning*, goes to the *keyhole* and *listens*, draws the *window-shade* and *returns*. SHE *nods quickly* and puts her head closer to his, her *wide-open eyes* on the audience. HE puts his head to hers, his *wide-open eyes* on the audience, then *turns quickly* and *whispers something* in her ear. SHE *nods with secret, uproarious delight*.

SHE: Yes!

HE: Yes?

SHE: Yes!

[They *embrace* and *click their heels* with *unrestrained enthusiasm*. THE WIFE holds out the bowl to the hus-

band with mock solemnity. HE grasps it and together they raise it above their heads, lower it to their knees, and then shell the beans with one accord. They kiss each other daintily six times. THE CURTAIN begins to quiver. As before, but accelerando.

HE: Stop, queer little dear!

Why is a kiss?

SHE: I don't know.

HE: You don't?

SHE: No!

HE: Then why do you do it?

SHE: Love!

HE: Love?

SHE: Yes!

HE: And why is—

[*They are interrupted. THE CURTAIN comes capering down! The last we behold of the happy pair is their frantic signalling for THE CURTAIN to wait till they have finished. But curtains cannot see—or understand?*]

PEOPLE WHO DIE



PEOPLE WHO DIE *

(An Echo-Play)

A MAN *and* A WOMAN *are sitting on a bench in front of a closed curtain. SHE is leaning against his shoulder and looking at a tablet which rests on his lap. HE is moving his pencil idly over the tablet.*

HE: I should like to write a play about death,
but it must not have people in it.
It must have people in it,
but not people who die.
It must have death in it,
but the death must not touch
people who die.

SHE: Such a play would not be a tragedy.

HE: The death must touch
the people who die in people—
nay, the people who die between people.

SHE: Such a play might be a tragedy.

HE: The play, then, must not have people in it—
people do not act in plays—
what is between them acts in plays—
the people between them—
they act in plays.
This is always the way of the plot:
people are alone:
people seek each other:

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people come of the seeking:
of the finding, asking, giving:
it is they who act in plays:

It is they who die.

SHE: You would write the play about them?

HE: Nay, I should like the play to be my play, the people, my people!

SHE: Nay, I should like the play to be my play, the people, my people!

HE: Nay, the people, our people, the play, our play!

SHE: Such a play would be a comedy!

HE: Will you do the other part?

[*A gong sounds gently.*

SHE: Sh! Begin!

There goes the curtain call!

[*The curtain spreads part way. A second curtain, or drapery, old rose in color, is disclosed, and A BOY and A GIRL, who indulge a rapid dialogue and pantomime.*

HE: My thought of you—

is—is like a rainbow—

it—it is an iris—

no—it is a peacock—

SHE: Why isn't it like a rainbow?

HE: It's like a rainbow—

and it isn't like a rainbow—

it's a rainbow when you can see a rainbow—

not a rainbow when a rainbow is gone.

SHE: Why isn't it an iris?

HE: It—it is an iris—

and it—it isn't an iris—

it's an iris when an iris holds her bloom like a lady—
not an iris when she's old and faint and faded.

SHE: Then it's a peacock?

HE: It isn't a peacock—

it's a peacock when a peacock opens his tail eyes—
and each eye sees you in its own way—
whatever the color and shape of it—
it isn't a peacock when he shuts his head eyes—
and brings all the others back to sleep.

SHE: Then your thought of me changes?

HE: It doesn't change!

It—it's more like an opal—
yes—it's more like an opal—

SHE: Doesn't an opal change?

HE: The water in an opal moves—

the quicksilver quavers—
the music undulates—
but the stone, the stone—
the stone of an opal is still—
it's the stone of an opal!

SHE: Your thought of me?

HE: My thought of you!

SHE: And I?

HE: You?

SHE: What am I?

HE: You? Why—

you are what I've been saying of you—
you—I can't say what you are—
you—are more than my thought of you—
deeper, higher, more colorful, beautiful, still—

SHE: Oh!

HE: Oh?

SHE: I want your thought to be like me—
I—I want to be like your thought—
you—you are holding us apart—
me—and your thought of me!

HE: No!

SHE: No? You—
how shall I know you love me—
you love what you think of me!

HE: I do not—
I—see here!
What is your thought of me
if it isn't like my thought of you?

SHE: My thought of you—
is—is like a zebra—
it—it has big stripes in it—
big stripes of faith—

HE: You stutter just as I do!

SHE: It—it isn't like a leopard—
the spots never change—

HE: You have two spots in your head—
they change—

SHE: They do not—

HE: They change me!

SHE: You change?

HE: From happy to happier to happiest!

SHE: Come back!

HE: You'll have to bring me!

[SHE *kisses him.*

SHE: Are you back again?

HE: From happiest to happier to happy.

SHE: Only happy?

HE: Don't send me off again!

[SHE *holds him.*

HE: Have you got me?
SHE: I hope so.
HE: Then don't you look at me!
SHE: You!
HE: You!
SHE: Rainbow—
HE: Zebra—
SHE: Peacock—
HE: Leopard—
SHE: I'll eat you.
HE: Eat away!
SHE: Tail and all!
HE: Don't forget the stone!
SHE: I can't eat the stone?
HE: Swallow it!
SHE: It will kill me?
HE: I hope so.
SHE: You!
HE: You!

*[The front curtain closes abruptly. After a pause,
THE WOMAN speaks slowly.]*

SHE: That was many years ago.
HE: That was many years ago.
SHE: And they are dead.
HE: And they are dead.
SHE: Two marionettes!
HE: Not marionettes!
SHE: Two dear little people.
HE: Two dear little people.
SHE: Why did they die?

HE: Don't disturb the plot—

let them show the way they died.

SHE: I don't want to see any more—

it's a tragedy—

HE: Tragedy there, but a comedy here!

SHE: They are dead.

HE: They are alive.

SHE: Poor dear little people.

HE: Rich dear little people.

SHE: They were kind.

HE: They were kind.

SHE: Little grandfather.

HE: Little grandmother.

SHE: You.

HE: You.

SHE: I don't want to see any more.

[The gong sounds again.]

HE: Sh! Behave!

There goes the curtain call!

[The curtain spreads part way. A third curtain, or drapery, gray in color, is disclosed, and A YOUNG MAN and A YOUNG WOMAN. Moderate dialogue and pantomime.]

HE: And what do you see now?

SHE: The image isn't the same.

HE: And only a moment ago—

SHE: I looked just then

like a gargoyle in a tree,

I looked just now

like a pixy or a dwarf.

HE: And only a moment ago,
you looked like a child seeing light?
What made the water move?

SHE: The wind made the water move—
the wind sent a child-like breeze—
the breeze blew
like a child blowing a bubble,
just before the bubble has gone too far.

HE: And all is still down there again?

SHE: Still down there, but not in me.

HE: Why isn't it still in you?

SHE: You know why.

HE: Where did the child of the wind come from?

SHE: Outside.

HE: You didn't make the water move?

SHE: I didn't make the water move.

HE: I didn't make the water move?

SHE: You didn't make the water move.

HE: Look again.

SHE: I am looking.

HE: All is still down there?

SHE: Still down there, but not in me.

HE: What has happened to the wind outside?

SHE: The wind outside flew away,
and left a child of itself in me,
and the twin child—

HE: The twin child?

SHE: You have the twin child in you.

HE: I have not—

SHE: You have—

dear—

you must not lie—

we must not lie—

you agreed, we must not lie.

HE: I agreed, we must not lie.

SHE: What has happened to me has happened to you—

I am not alone in this?

HE: You are not alone in this.

SHE: You look again!

HE: I am looking.

SHE: What do you see now?

HE: The image of myself.

SHE: The image?

HE: Myself.

SHE: What do you look like?

HE: I don't want to look—

I don't want to see.

SHE: You said you would look.

HE: I said I would.

SHE: And we said we would be honest.

HE: We said we would.

SHE: Now you want to turn away.

HE: It hurts to look at oneself.

SHE: Even for us?

HE: Even for us.

SHE: We will never be able to see, unless you see yourself, and I myself.

HE: And I tell you what I see.

SHE: And I tell you what I see.

HE: You will never be able to see me
till I tell you what I see.

SHE: Now you are brave—

you have said it at last.

HE: You are braver than I.

SHE: Heretofore—

HE: Ah, heretofore—

SHE: We were dishonest.

HE: We weren't dishonest—

SHE: We weren't dishonest—

but we saw only what we tried to see—

I looked only at you and you at me—

and I only looked at you by looking at myself.

HE: And I at me.

SHE: And I told you what I saw in me was you—so—

when a breeze came,

and a second breeze,

and a wind, and a wind, and a wind—

HE: And a wind, and a wind, and a wind—

SHE: I no longer saw you in me—

you in me vanished.

HE: And you in me.

SHE: Look at me in the pool.

HE: I won't look.

SHE: Be brave.

HE: I can't be.

SHE: I'll look at you in the pool?

HE: I will look.

SHE: Lean farther this way—

bring your head closer—

what do you see?

HE: You.

SHE: No?

HE: My image of you.

SHE: Sit up—

shut your eyes—

what do you see now?

HE: I see a pool.

SHE: Where is the pool?

HE: Down in me.

SHE: Does the water move?

HE: The water moves.

SHE: Why does it move?

HE: I see you there.

SHE: You see the image you saw outside—

you mustn't see that—

if it weren't there the water wouldn't move!

HE: I know.

SHE: You must see yourself!

HE: I can't see myself if I don't see you!

SHE: That is where the shadow moves!

If it would only die!

HE: What shall we do?

SHE: I don't know.

HE: I want to open my eyes.

SHE: Don't, don't!

HE: It is dark!

I am afraid!

SHE: You must be brave.

HE: Give me your hand.

SHE: Here.

HE: Where is it?

SHE: There.

HE: If the shadow would only die!

SHE: Be brave,

and it will die.

HE: I begin to see myself—

SHE: What do you see?

HE: I only begin to see—

SHE: Look, look—

and tell me what you see?

HE: I wish you would look for me?

SHE: I cannot—

I must not—

tell me what you see?

HE: I cannot—

I still see—

what I am trying to see!

SHE: Me?

HE: You. Oh—

give me yet a while—

the length of a breeze—

the last breeze—

to be brave?

SHE: I will.

HE: The last breeze is so soft—

so beautiful—

and clear water so cruel.

SHE: And will you tell me?

HE: As soon as I can see.

SHE: Then here is the last breeze.

[SHE caresses him quickly. HE opens his eyes. HE caresses her. SHE opens her eyes.]

HE: Gargoyle—

SHE: Child—

HE: Pixy—

SHE: Child.

[The curtain closes abruptly. After a pause, THE WOMAN speaks excitedly.]

SHE: That was ten years ago.

HE: More or less.

SHE: How could she—

how dare she be so cruel?

HE: She was brave.

There's no bravery like cruelty.

SHE: She had a poniard in her—

she stabbed him with it—

how he bled, how he died!

HE: As brave a human—

SHE: He?

HE: She!

She made him see himself—

he who would look at her—

there's no bravery like that—

SHE: What did he see?

HE: You know what he saw—

you mustn't disturb the plot—

SHE: I don't want any plot,

I don't want any play—

tell me what he saw!

HE: The surest way to life is art—

SHE: I don't want to see life,

I don't want to see art—

tell me what he saw!

HE: You know what he saw—

if you don't you're still—

you're an owl in the sun!

SHE: He saw the most beautiful—

the most courageous—

the most patient—

HE: Superlative hyperbole!—

three lies in succession—

lies have no part in real life?

SHE: I'm not lying—

HE: Sh!

SHE: It's you who would lie—

HE: Sh!

SHE: He saw—

he saw—

he still sees—

he still sees—

HE: Be still!

[The gong sounds again.]

HE: There goes the curtain call!

SHE: I don't want your dumb play—

it's horrible—I want—

HE: We can't hold curtains

for you and your whims—

SHE: I want—

HE: Be still!

SHE: Stupid old play!

HE: Sh!

[The curtain spreads part way. A fourth curtain, or drapery, blue in color, is disclosed, and A MAN and A WOMAN.]

HE: I know a shell,
a plain white shell,
I like to hold to my ear.
Perhaps it tells something
in no phrase different
from the talk of other shells;
perhaps it isn't kin
to sea sand
or white clouds;
perhaps it is only

myself I hear there.

But I know a shell,

a plain white shell,

I like to hold to my ear.

SHE: What a quaint soft tune!

And where is the shell?

Is it this one?

HE: That has three coral veins in it—

one touch of red, and the white is gone!

SHE: Is it this one?

HE: That has a speck, a blue speck—

like a white dream doubted.

SHE: Is it this—

this is a white?

HE: That is a white,

but not the white of the tune.

SHE: Where is the shell you know?

Didn't the sea bring it in?

HE: The sea didn't bring it.

SHE: How could you find it—

sea shells come from the sea?

HE: ~~This~~ isn't a sea shell.

SHE: Then you didn't find it here?

HE: I found it here.

SHE: You know a shell,

a plain white shell,

you like to hold to your ear.

It must be outside of you?

HE: Because I can see myself.

SHE: What has that to do with hearing?

HE: The roar inside must subside

ere I can see myself, and hear.

SHE: The roar inside?

HE: The roar of you.

SHE: We were two oceans?

HE: We were.

SHE: And what are we now?

HE: Two people,
each with a shell to his ear.

SHE: Perhaps it tells something
in no phrase different
from the talk of other shells.

What does that say to you?

HE: Shells all tell the same tale
after they have left the ocean.

SHE: Ours have left the ocean?

HE: Utterly.

SHE: He taught them their tale?

HE: He did.

SHE: What did he tell them?

HE: He said,
I am alone—
he said,
there is another, alone as I—
he said,
tell that other, I am alone—
he said,
ask that other, is she alone?—
he said,
tell that other,
I am she, and she is I—
he said,
ask that other—

SHE: Ask that other?

HE: Whether I lie?

SHE: She said,

 tell that other,

 he does not lie.

HE: Perhaps it isn't kin—

SHE: To sea sand

 or white clouds.

 What does that say to you?

HE: Sea sand

 and white clouds

 go away.

SHE: What makes them move?

HE: The water in them.

SHE: Shells do not move?

HE: Shells do not move.

SHE: They came from the oceans?

 Oceans are water?

HE: The oceans were still—

 and so then the tale

 they gave to the shells.

SHE: A tale is very delicate!

HE: And indestructible!

SHE: Perhaps it is only

 myself I hear there—

HE: Perhaps it is only

 myself I hear there.

SHE: A quaint soft tune!

 Has your stillness

 another to sing to me?

HE: One plus one plus one plus—

SHE: One more song!

HE: Are you ready?

SHE: I am.

HE: Hold the shell to your ear.

SHE: This one?

HE: No, that one.

SHE: Which one?

HE: Your hand.

SHE: Which hand?

HE: Either.

SHE: The other would be lonesome?

HE: Give it to me.

Are you ready?

SHE: Yes, hurry.

HE: Close it tight or a breeze will slip in!

SHE: Simpleton—

sprite—

fish—

dolphin—

HE: Do you worship—

SHE: Wait, I must listen!

Now! Come!

HE: Do you worship a sea

to which you can never be more

than a stone for melting into sand?

It is greater than revenge!

Are you carving a pebble,

one foolish white pebble,

the waves cannot reach?

It is greater than silence,

a thing to scorn dissolution,

a greater tomb than mountains!

SHE: That is a queer, a terrible tune.

HE: Queer, not terrible.

SHE: Is it the same sea, the same?

HE: The same two seas.

SHE: And the pebble—

you are the pebble!

HE: And you.

SHE: Oh!

HE: Oh?

SHE: Let's throw pebbles to each other—

there are millions of pebbles here!

HE: Throw pebbles?

SHE: Toss them—

ever so gently—

let's call ourselves pebbles

and toss them—

like rainbow curves—

or an ellipse of the moon—

or arc of fountain streams!

HE: Sh—

some of them might fall!

SHE: I don't care—

there are others—

millions of them—

let's play we are pebbles—

even unto the last one—

our tomb—

the tomb pebble!

HE: Nymph—

sea-urchin—

mollusc—

SHE: Pebble!

HE: Pebble!

[They begin to toss imaginary pebbles with varied exclamations. The curtain closes abruptly. After a pause, THE WOMAN speaks dreamily.]

SHE: I am tired,
very sleepy—

HE: That was five years ago.

SHE: I am very tired,
very sleepy—

HE: That was five years ago.

SHE: Put your tablet away—
let it rest—

HE: I should like to write a play about life,
this play is too much like a dream.

I should like to write the play about life,
but it must not have people in it,
people are too much like a dream.

SHE: Oh—

HE: It must have people in it,
but not people who live.

It must have a dream in it,
but the dream must not touch
people who live.

SHE: Oh—

I am so sleepy—
my head is so sleepy—

HE: The life must touch
the people who dream in people—
nay, the people—

SHE: The people—

HE: The people—

SHE: Where is your arm—
do you love me?—
put it about me.

HE: Where is yours—
do you love me?—
put yours about me.

SHE: Are you tired?

HE: I am tired.

SHE: Shut your eyes.

HE: Shut your eyes.

[Gradually, they fall into a doze. Gradually, the curtain opens part way. The scene is fairly dark, but the outlines of two shadows may be discerned. They speak in lively echo-whispers.]

HE: Hello, dream!

SHE: Hello, dream!

HE: What are you doing here?

SHE: What are you doing here?

HE: Why did you go away?

SHE: Why did you go away?

HE: You said you'd never return?

SHE: You said you'd never return?

HE: What do you want now?

SHE: What do you want now?

HE: I want you!

SHE: I want you!

HE: Come and catch me!

SHE: Come and catch me!

HE: Go away!

SHE: Go away!

HE: Don't go away!

SHE: Don't go away!

HE: If you must go—

SHE: If you must go—

HE: Don't go for more than a nap!

SHE: Don't go for more than a nap!

HE: Hello, people!

SHE: Hello, people!

HE: Have you got me?

SHE: Have you got me?

[HE *laughs*; SHE *laughs*. *Final curtain.*

PIANISSIMO

PIANISSIMO*

(A Nodding-Play)

Two elderly gentlemen, in clothes even older than themselves, are just sitting down—with the outward aid of crooked canes and the inward support of sighs—on what is presumably a park bench, shaded by mountain laurels, with a swan-pond for a background. The men also carry the venerable pipes of tradition: in this case, heavily crusted corn-cobs. Their speech, very slow and gentle, gives them the sound of impersonal instruments improvising a harmless duo: prosaic music blown into the air at the end of smoke spirals, the relighting of pipes necessarily frequent. The only apparent difference between them, traceable perhaps to the unconscious bias of habitual meditation and perpetual comparison of ideas, has reduced itself to a slight wagging of the head on the part of the one as opposed to a slight nodding on the part of the other. Speech and movement coincide almost as caressingly as the effect produced by lips brushing wood-instruments.

HENRY: Nay, but I insist
that the quick sharp touches the rain
and slower titillation the sun
put upon those flowers we saw
have in them the same heedless passion,

* Copyright, 1922, by Alfred Kreymborg.

heedless of all save the self,
which envelops unconscious adolescence.
That isn't the type of caress I'm seeking.

HODGE: Those flowers were pale indeed
with a suggestion of pink and beginning of blue!

HENRY: Early degrees of coloration
solely indicative of the mood
of self-interest of rain and of sun;
alternately shaping something,
like a left hand and right
of one and the same conjurer
reproducing his own vague image:
the flower somehow a captive,
clay just as we are,
subject to the next modulation
towards the next helpless state of being.
I've had my share and enough
of such no longer magical passes.

HODGE: Nearer to red and closer to purple!

HENRY: That is the type of caress
which has made of what I was
the droning instrument I am,
played upon in the one tonality
of a careless self-love so long
that the grave itself
will simply be the final effort
of the same somebody using me
to express himself in a minor cadence—
his little alas but a sigh
that his composition closed so shabbily.

HODGE: And still you cannot recall,
stubborn lad that you are,
a single variation, a dissonance, a brève?

HENRY: Neither can you, Hodge,
with your eye pointing forward!

HODGE: Let us try just once more again—

HENRY: Folk-song of the hopeful!—

HODGE: And perhaps—

HENRY: Da capo of the hopeless!—

HODGE: Possibly the shade of this laurel,
itself the design of accident,
angle of sun and of tree
meeting, rounding, spreading,
will quiet your melancholy,
and some quaint caress have room to stir,
your memory mislaid?

HENRY: Memory is a cupboard
I have gone to myriad times
and have returned the one time always
with relics so tedious
I find them heavier than boulders.
Since you who persist must try once again,
pray, take down the future if you can.

HODGE: Let us then sit here and wait,
and the strange, the new, may yet transpire.

HENRY: You nod your head and I wag mine,
that is the difference between us;
you have verticals left in you,
I am all horizontal.

HODGE: But we are breathed into moving
in accordance with the odd,
delicately reciprocal nuance
of our one and the same—

HENRY: Bassoonist!—

HODGE: You dub him lugubriously!—

HENRY: Accurately!—

HODGE: Henry!

[HENRY *looks at* HODGE. HODGE *smiles. They smoke in silence. HODGE points with his pipe-stem.*

HODGE: That swan,
a white interrogation
embracing the water,
and being embraced in response—

HENRY: Their eyes reflecting each other,
their bodies displacing—

HODGE: That swallow cleaving the air,
trusting his wings to the waves of ether—

HENRY: And the air trusting him
with room in her body,
relinquishing just enough space
for him to fit himself into—

HODGE: Or the worm underground,
digging cylinder channels—

HENRY: And the earth undulating
to the pressure of excavation—

HODGE: Caresses like these, simple Henry—

HENRY: Caresses like those, simpler Hodge,
have been clapped in my ear
by your credulous tongue
with such affectionate fortitude,
I'm a bell attacked by echoes
each time the sea moves.

[HODGE *looks at* HENRY and wags his head. HENRY
nods and smiles. HODGE turns away.

HENRY: You also remind me of evergreens
refusing to acknowledge the seasons,
or unable to distinguish
between white flowers and snow.

You're as old and as young as romance.

HODGE: It's you who fall redundant,
you who fondle the rondo—
why not have done and call me senile?

HENRY: Senility is a sling
invented by cynical youths
who envy and would rob
the old of their possessions.

HODGE: You admit possessions?—
you contradict yourself?—

HENRY: My property
comprises the realization,
stripped bare of hope or hypothesis,
that I own neither things nor persons;
least of all these, myself.
Nor am I longer deluded
with even the thought of touching
a body that pirate youth would filch,
who cannot rid his blood of desire.

HODGE: Then you must be that youth,
since you crave—

HENRY: A type of caress?

HODGE: How do you wriggle out of that?

[HODGE and HENRY relight their pipes.

HENRY: The type of caress I crave
must have in it
no desire to make of me

aught of what it would make of itself.

It must not say to me,

“I would make of you
more of me and less of you—”

HODGE: Nor must it lure me,

by virtue of the bounty
of its body or the beauty
of its mind, to sigh,

“I would make of myself
more of you and less of me—”

HENRY: I have had enough
of such juxtaposition—

HODGE: The immortal dialogue
of life and of death—

HENRY: The recurrent symbol
of being and reflection—

HODGE: Of Narcissus
in love with himself—

HENRY: Of God chanting a solo
to comfort His loneliness,
like an aged woman
knitting things for her children to wear
in her own image,
singing: “This is I,
and you are mine;
so wear my love as I love you.”

[*Pause.* HENRY *lowers his head*; so does HODGE.]

HENRY: If it is
God who fashioned me,
is it He
who asks, is He pleased?

HODGE: Does my prayer,
 which is His
 if I'm His,
 move or leave Him unmoved?

HENRY: Is it He
 who lifts these questions,
 or am I
 to blame for thinking?

HODGE: If He,
 noticing me
 at last, notices Himself—
 what's wrong with Him?

HENRY: Really,
 I'm not regretting
 what I am,
 nor begging, make me better.

HODGE: If I
 have a sense of the droll,
 surely
 He has one too—

HENRY: Asking Himself
 to pray to Himself—
 that is,
 if He fashioned me?

[*Pause.*]

HODGE: Does it comfort you?

HENRY: A little—for a moment.

HODGE: Farther than last time?

HENRY: A tiny stretch beyond.

[*They raise their heads.*]

HODGE: It's still a wee mad boomerang—

HENRY: Innocent blasphemy
of the inner
frantic to grow to the outer,
to the more than itself—
the molecule a star,
the instant universal—
the me a trifle closer
to the you that gave it life.

HODGE: You recall how you composed it
years before we came to this?

HENRY: As clearly as a brook,
and you sitting in its midst
like a pebble nodding assent
to the foolish reckless sound—

HODGE: Strange that we return to it!

HENRY: Stranger still, we do naught but return!

[*They continue smoking, HENRY wagging, HODGE nodding.*]

HODGE: Did you feel something stir?

HENRY: Only another breeze—

HODGE: But didn't you see that cloud alter?—

HENRY: The cause of the breeze—

HODGE: Caressing us?—

HENRY: Leaving me colder—

HODGE: Me warmer.

HENRY: When the temperature in a room
is higher or lower than normal,
it is needful to open
or to shut a window—

HODGE: Which?

HENRY: A west wind
urges me to shut a west window,
an east an east—that is all.
And I have known the same touch
to thrill and leave me cold,
and this monotonous heart of mine
to open and close in childish acquiescence—

HODGE: Button your coat about you—

HENRY: We have no business
gadding around in the spring—
it was you who suggested it,
you with your nodding.

HODGE: It was the look of the world outdoors—
let us try another place,
or wander back home again.

HENRY: And try just once more?

HODGE: Perhaps, providing—

HENRY: We are like twin philosophers,
phrase-practitioners
who argue with slender,
tapering sensitive beards
which each lays persuasive hold of,
pulling first the one the other
and the other the one in turn,
till their heads collide and rebound
back to the starting point,
with *if* or *suppose* or *providing* or *but*—

HODGE: But you have more wisdom?—

HENRY: And you more happiness!

And thus the moon pursues the sun!

[HODGE touches HENRY.]

HODGE: Are you angry?

HENRY: Angry with you?

[They eye each other, smile faintly, and turn away.]

HENRY: Your talk comes to me from afar,
though you are only an elbow away;
like rain making an arid soil
intimate with better things.

They, perhaps, are what are left of me.

HODGE: If I say, I love thee,
in some guise or other—
this is more than talk?

HENRY: The gesture of a lonely spirit
reaching out to a lonelier.

[They methodically shake out their pipes and stuff them away. HODGE nudges HENRY ever so gently. HENRY tries to rise. HODGE has to aid him. They move away haltingly, HODGE's stick tapping a little in advance of HENRY's, and HODGE's arm through HENRY's. HENRY tries to shake off HODGE, but the latter persists. They move slightly faster.]

HENRY: Let us go silently
the next pace or two—

HODGE: As you will—

HENRY: And let other things speak.

HODGE: For us?

HENRY: For themselves.

[They nod together, and then disappear, HODGE's stick still sounding in advance of HENRY's.]

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